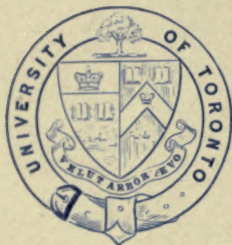
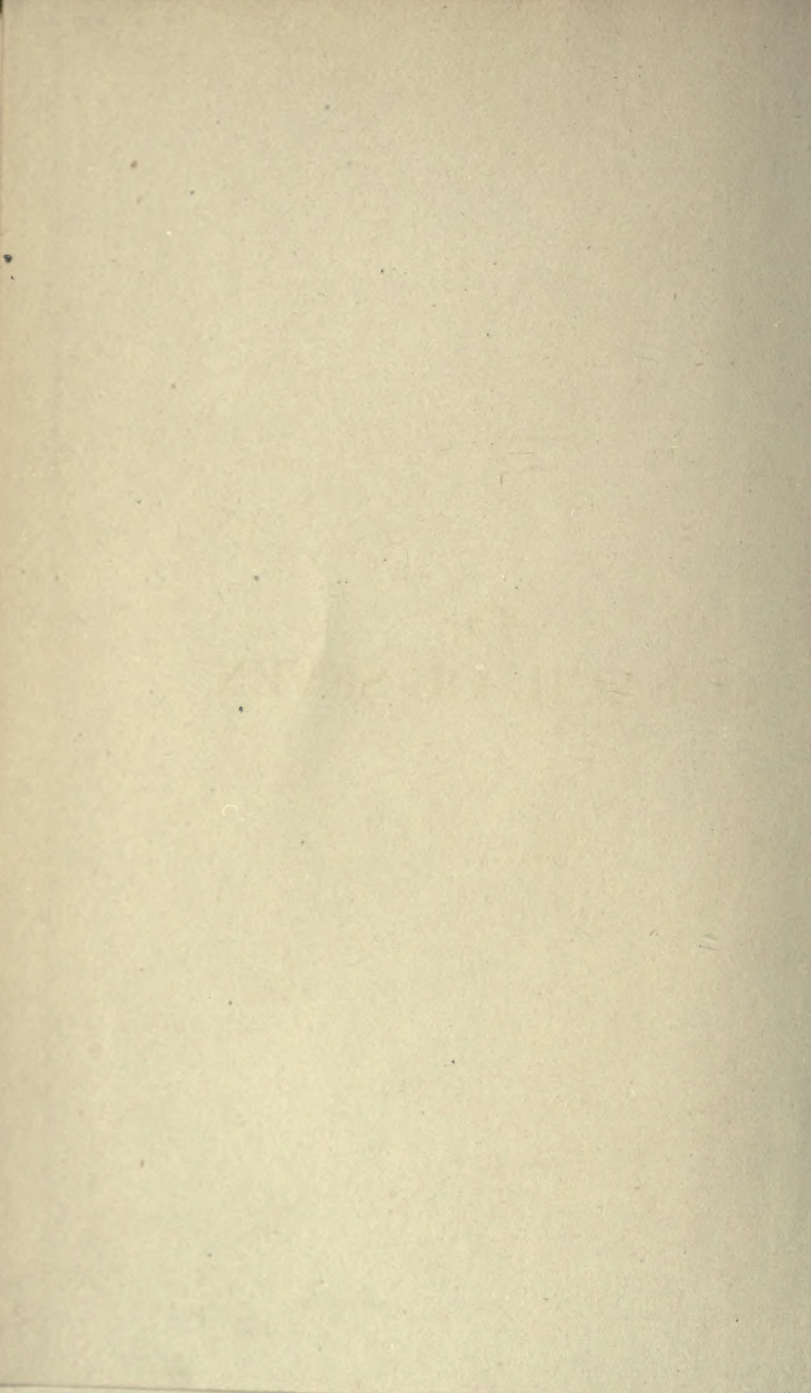


THE COUNCIL
of
SEVEN

J. C. SNAITH



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The
COUNCIL OF SEVEN

By
J. C. SNAITH

**The Council of Seven
The Adventurous Lady
The Undefeated
The Sailor
The Time Spirit
The Coming
Anne Feversham**

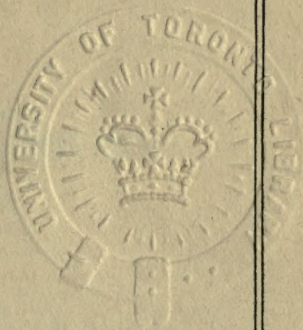
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The
COUNCIL OF SEVEN

BY
J. C. SNAITH

AUTHOR OF "THE UNDEFEATED," "THE
SAILOR," "BROKE OF COVENDEN," ETC.

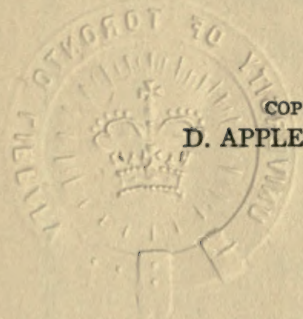


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The
COUNCIL OF SEVEN



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I

AT FIVE o'clock of a September evening, Helen Sholto left the office, as usual, and went to her club. Opposite the tube lift in Dover Street, London, out of which she came, was a bookstall. Clamoring across the front, a newsbill at once caught the eye of an informed modern woman:

BRITAIN AND AMERICA

AMAZING SPEECH BY

JOHN ENDOR, M.P.

She bought a copy of the *Evening Press*. Looking it quickly through, she found in the column for late news a blurred, hastily-inserted paragraph

THE ANGLO-AMERICAN SITUATION

Speaking to-day at Blackhampton Town Hall at a luncheon given in his honor, John Endor, M.P., said that this country's relations with America were bound to prove a source of continual and growing anxiety. Dangerous, subterranean influences were at work on both sides of the Atlantic. In many things of vital importance the two nations would never see eye to eye. Let the people of these islands always stand ready. Personally, he believed in the Sword.

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✓ Helen gasped. The words were like icy water thrown in the face. And the sensation of having had all the breath taken out of her body was increased by the knowledge that a second purchaser of the *Evening Press*, a rough-looking workman, standing by her elbow, had given a savage exclamation. Moreover, in the act of so doing, by that process of telepathy beyond whose threshold Science has yet to peer, he caught the distracted eyes of the particularly attractive-looking girl who was folding up her own copy of the paper.

"Does for him, I reckon!" And the man spat savagely.

Helen turned abruptly away, and walked slowly along Dover Street. A thousand imps were loose in her brain. Space, quiet, solitude were needed in which to quell them, to bring them under control. Almost it was as if the bottom had fallen out of the world in which she lived.

II

THE Helicon Club was at the end of the street. Women interested in literature, the arts, in social and public affairs could lunch, dine, entertain their friends in this oasis. Its pleasant rooms were large and cool, and, crowning boon in the very heart of modern Babylon, they offered even a measure of isolation. For the members' roll did not respond too readily to the length of "the waiting list."

A nook of the "silence" room enabled Helen to think her thoughts with the help of a well-earned cup of tea. And a second look at the evening paper cast one ray upon the darkness. "I believe in the Sword." The phrase hurt like a blow, yet somehow it forced the conclusion upon her that the speech could not have been reported accurately. Knowing John Endor so well, she could not bring herself to believe that those were the words he had used. It hardly seemed credible that without some hint beforehand he should go back on all that he stood for in political life.

Bent on setting doubt at rest, she went presently to

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the telephone and rang up John's chambers in Bury Street. She was informed that Mr. Endor had not yet returned from Blackhampton, but that he was expected home about half-past seven. Thereupon she left a message, asking him, if not otherwise engaged, to come and dine with her, adding the little feminine proviso that "he was not to dress."

It was then a quarter to six. Two hours slowly passed. Helen had letters to write, a book deeply interesting to look at. Much was said, all the same, for her mental habit that, with a grim specter in the outskirts of her mind, she could yet dragoon her will to the task of putting it away.

A few minutes before eight John arrived. She went to him at once. The glow of her greeting masked a tumult of feeling. None could have guessed from such *entrain* that she was facing a crisis upon whose issue her whole life must turn.

"What a piece of luck that you were able to come!"

The eyes and the laugh of a man deeply in love proclaimed this happy chance to be even more than that.

With no other preface, Helen led the way to the dining room. Before one question could be put to a hard-driven politician he must be fed. No matter what her own emotions might immediately dictate, she had a sense, almost masculine, of the rules of the game. Hers was a powerfully disciplined nature. A terrible phrase seared her like an acid, but for the time being sheer stoicism allowed her to bear the pain.

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A table had been commandeered without difficulty in a favorite corner. Only a few of the Club habitués were dining, but John Endor brought a new interest into the room. It was no more than the emotion he was accustomed to excite. He leapt to the eye of every assembly. A force, a magnet, the lines of a rare personality made an effect of positive beauty. Nearly all women were attracted by him.

Well over six feet high, thin almost to emaciation, pale with the cast of thought, his high cheek-bones seemed to accentuate the hollows beneath them. The poise of the head and the features exquisitely bold might have been lures for the chisel of Pheidias; the deep eyes with their in-striking glances were those of a seer. Moving with freedom and grace, he had the look of a man who has seen a vision of the eternal. Nature at last seemed to have come near that which through the centuries she had been in search of. In the mind and mansion of John Endor her only concern was ultimate things.

As he crossed the wide room, intense curiosity tinged in some cases by an open admiration, was in the gaze of the other diners. Yet this did not apply to all. The curiosity was universal, but in one or two instances there was also a steady, level-lidded hostility. Helen was conscious of this as she piloted him to their table, perhaps because it was to be expected; but in this rising politician who had Gladstone's power of arousing strong yet diverse emotion wherever he went there was

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an apartness which lifted him far beyond the plane whereon friend gives the countercheck to foe.

It was a good dinner. And the guest, for all his air of other-worldliness, had none of that rather dubious breeding which holds itself indifferent to what it eats and drinks. He complimented his hostess upon a modest sole Colbert and a poulet en casserole—the Club chef he assured her had nothing to learn from Saint James's Street and Pall Mall; to the claret he rendered all the honors of a vintage wine; in a word, John Endor's look of high ascetism did not taboo the minor arts of life.

It was this zest in everything which made him such a lovable companion. The seer, the visionary, was a man of the world. In spite of his dedication, in spite of the inward fire of the prophets of old, he had that subtle appreciation of the human comedy which is one of the final graces of a liberal education.

This evening, as always, he was charming. Helen could not help yielding to his attraction, no matter how strict her guard against it; she could not help being fascinated by his mental outlook and being lulled, even a little dangerously, by the personality of the man she loved. Listening to him now made it seem almost tragic that one should have to put the question she had summoned him to ask.

Delays are perilous. Twice before the enchanted meal was through she was at the point of sending for the evening paper, so that she might learn the truth.

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The fallibility of the newspaper press was still her hope. But while he talked as only he could, it seemed an act of barbarism to open the case so crudely. While his fancy and his humor played upon a hundred things how could one sidetrack him with such a doubt? There was some absurd mistake. High faith in this hero bade her take care.

Almost before she knew that she had let a precious moment go, she found herself bitterly rueing the fact. One of his odd, quick, unforeseen turns brought her up dead against an impasse she would have given much to avoid.

Plunging an impetuous hand in his coat, he suddenly produced a half sheet of notepaper, and tossed it over the table into her lap. "High time," he laughed, "we let the dear old *Morning Post* into our *secret de Polichinelle*."

She unfolded the slip of paper and read with a pang of dismay:

An engagement is announced between John Endor, only son of the late Myles Endor, Wyndham, Middleshire, and Lady Elizabeth Endor, and Helen Mary, eldest daughter of James Lee Sholto and Mrs. Sholto of Longmore, Richmond, Virginia, U. S. A.

"Will it meet the case?" The question was whimsically direct, even without the enforcement of his amused eyes.

The blood burned slowly vivid in her face. Happily

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the quality or absence of quality in the electric light prevented his seeing it.

"Don't you think?"—in a gay whisper.

There was no escape. "One shrinks——" Her will cut the phrase in two. To have completed it would have been to say too little or too much.

"Everybody's secret," he laughed.

As she felt the knife edge of the irony lurking in the situation, she gave a little gasp. There was only one thing for her now. She must harden her heart.

"I hadn't realized," she said, in her soft voice, a delicious blend of the Old World and the New, "that your speech to-day was going to be so important."

"Quite the last word for it," he said, lightly. "A heart-to-heart talk, don't you know, with a few friends and constituents. For some dark reason they insisted on giving me a lovely bit of old Sheffield plate—and a scroll. One mustn't forget the scroll. Perhaps the birds have been talking. Anyhow, the Chairman thought the salver would look very nice on the dining-room sideboard of a newly married couple!"

He waited for her laugh, but only one tiny segment of her mind was listening.

"It fills the entire placard of the *Evening Press*." She dare not look at him. There was a clutch at her heart.

"What! My jawbation! Shade of the sea serpent and the giant gooseberry!"

She felt the beat of her heart strike upwards. Her

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throat was filled by it. He sounded hardly more than a laughing, irresponsible boy. And yet the hour was surely near when even his lighter grace notes must prove organ tones in the strained ear of the time.

III

THE fates were at her elbow. As she sent for the *Evening Press*, she realized that fact to the full. Afraid to turn again to her occupation of the last three hours, the weighing of her love for John Endor, she was yet unable to escape the challenge of a dire event. Truly a woman, yet beyond all things she was an American citizen. No matter what his spells, she could never marry a man of these ideas. Her country must stand first.

The *Evening Press* arrived. Folding back the sheet, the rather unpretty sheet with its crude headlines and blurred ink, she placed a finger on the fatal paragraph.

While he read she watched him. But his face was hidden by the paper and it was not until a slow perusal was at an end that it came again into view. So great was the change that it struck her almost with fear. The allure was gone; such a depth of pallor had the look of death itself. But the eyes were blazing and the large, mobile orator's mouth was clenched in a vain effort to control its emotion.

"Blackguards!" he gasped. She saw that in his eyes were tears. Her brain was numb, yet the glow racing through her veins was sheer joy. The question was answered; every doubt was laid. So much for the

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woman. And in that moment the woman was paramount. But in the balanced mind, delicately poised, acutely commonsensible, was now a concern beyond the personal. What was the meaning of it all?

"I knew of course . . . I felt . . . that you had been . . . misreported." . . . Her words were tentative, inadequate. Painfully watching the man opposite she knew only too well that the John Endor of three minutes back might never have been. The play, the interplay, of changing lights upon his face and in his eyes were beyond her ken. Almost for the first time she began to have a real perception of the infinities within him, of that central power which could sweep a great audience off its feet.

Of a sudden he sprang fiercely from his chair. "It's devilish!" His voice was hoarse. "Absolutely devilish!"

Hardly had he used the words when the pain in her eyes reined him back. Abruptly as he had risen, he sat down again at the table. "I beg your pardon!" he said. "But, you see, it's a stab in the back—from the world's most accomplished assassin."

She saw that his lips were white and that his face was drawn.

"Mayn't it be just a mere accident?" Courage was needed to say anything. To say that called for much.

He laughed harshly. The gay irresponsible boy might never have been. "Accidents don't happen to the Universal Press."

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"But why shouldn't they—once in a while?" Her voice had a maternal caress in it.

"The U. P. is the most efficient machine ever invented. It lives for and by efficiency—damnable word! That's the talisman with which it sways five continents. God help us all! No accident here."

"Can you really be sure?"

"Internal evidence. The few casual, cut-and-dried phrases I used, hardly more than a formal returning of thanks, have been so twisted round that they are the exact opposite of what was meant."

"Perhaps there's been a confusion of names."

"No! no! Much too circumstantial—John Endor—luncheon—this afternoon—Blackhampton Town Hall. There's no excuse. And the trick is so simple, so easy, once you condescend to its use. Take that final phrase, 'I believe in the Sword.' "

Helen waited eagerly.

"Knock out the first letter of the last word and you have the phrase I used."

She was blinded for a moment by the flood of light let in by this concrete instance. It went far to prove that his suspicions, which by nature he was the last man in the world to harbor, were not without warrant. Such a rebuttal of the charge against himself was complete, final; at the same time Helen Sholto had a very strong reason of her own for declining to accept all the implications that now arose.

In a sense she herself was an employee of the Uni-

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versal Press. For nearly two years she had been one of the private secretaries of Saul Hartz, the master spirit of the U. P.—its organizer of victory. Moreover to the Colossus, as he was playfully called, she had a deep sense of loyalty. To her he had always seemed a truly great man. Moving up and down the intensive London world, it was no new thing to hear harshly criticized the mighty organization of international newspapers of which he was the head. More than once she had heard its motives impugned, but she had shrewdly perceived that so great a force in the life of the time could be wielded only at a price. To Helen Sholto the Colossus stood forth the *beau idéal* of a considerate, almost princely, employer. His foes were many, but none denied his genius. And in the sight of Helen he was so considerable a man, the admiration he excited was so keen, her sense of gratitude was so lively and so deep, that it was almost *lèse majesté* to traverse his political acts.

It had always been the aim of the Colossus to keep as much as possible in the background of affairs. None the less, in his own despite, he was becoming known as the secret power which propelled many a great movement of the time. It was said that he created and directed public opinion on more than one continent—to such an extent that he made and unmade governments; enforced and canceled treaties; in a word, he and the International Newspaper Ring that he controlled had become a menace to the world. But Helen Sholto in

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all her dealings with this man had never had reason to suspect that he claimed for himself these plenary powers.

Sensitive as she was for John Endor and jealous for his growing reputation, it now became her clear duty to defend Saul Hartz. She believed him to be an honest man. Had one doubt infected her mind she could not have served him. But in the immediate presence of her fiancé's terrible indictment she lost the power to marshal her ideas. Womanlike she grew a little wounded by such a condemnation of the Colossus and all his works.

Granted that the blow had shaken John to the foundations and making allowance for a vivid temperament, she could have wished in this tragic hour that the sufferer had shown a little more regard for her feelings. But she had only to exhibit those feelings, or as much of them as pride would allow, for this impulsive child-of-a-man to be on his knees.

Humbly he owned that his sense of outrage had carried him completely away. He should have remembered that Mr. Hartz was her patron and friend. A naïf, almost boyish apology, bound her wound, wiped away her tears. His outburst was freely forgiven. Perhaps it was forgiven the more freely inasmuch as Helen felt quite sure in her own mind that she would soon be able to clear one hero of the charges brought against him by the other.

IV

"I'LL ring up the office at once." Helen rose impulsively. "They must know what a dreadful blunder the U. P. reporter has made. I'll get through if I can to Mr. Gage, the editor, and tell him that on no account must the *Planet* come out with the speech in that form. I'll also get through to Mr. Jevons, the chief editor of the U. P., and ask him to lose no time in withdrawing their version, and circulating an absolute contradiction. And as soon as I see the Chief himself, which should be to-morrow morning at eleven o'clock, I'll ask him personally to do what he can to put things right."

John Endor pressed her hand. It was more than homage to the woman he loved, it was a tribute, almost involuntary, to her decision, her fine capacity, her clear good sense. Of the Colossus it had been said that his fairy godmother had given him a rare faculty of choosing the heaven-sent instrument. Even in the sight of John Endor this able woman had never shone quite so much as in this crisis.

Forsaking a favorite iced pudding and hot chocolate sauce, she went there and then to the telephone

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box. Endor, alone at the table, sat a picture of dismay. He had a full share of the egoism inseparable from a man who believes intensely in himself. It was his sense of election that lay at the root of his power. He was an elemental besides; his mind was a thing of wide curves, moving on broad lines of right and wrong. For one in essence so primitive, it would have been hard to exaggerate the force of the blow.

The enemy was out in the open at last. Sitting there in a thrall of sudden darkness, that was his thought. The Colossus to whom in the spirit of Sir Galahad he had offered battle was known as a deadly and a subtle foe. To such an extent had he centralized power, so absolute was his control of the wires, to such perfection had he brought his "stunts," his "propaganda," and all the rest of the paraphernalia, which so easily fouled public opinion at its source, that it was said that he could kill a reputation as easily as he could make one.

For some little time past, Endor had suspected that he was on the "Index." More than once had he challenged the *bona fides* of the U. P.; more than once had he thrown down the gage to the all-powerful newspaper ring which was now proposing to link up every continent. Moreover, in the phrase of a recent speech, he had bitterly attacked "its *Vehmgericht* of assassins." That speech, made to Helen's dismay, and of which she was far from realizing the true significance, would not, he knew, be forgiven. Nothing

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wounds like the truth. To Helen, however, it was part of his "platform," an amusingly, over-emphasized article of political faith. She did not know, she could not be expected to know, that it was a deliberate offering of battle to the most potent evil in the life of the time. It was David *vs.* Goliath. The primitive sling and pebbles had hardly a chance, but David was upheld by the divine courage of youth and by a pure cause.

Already he was in the arena. He could feel the horrid breath of the monster on his face. One flick he had had of a grisly paw, just one little flick below the belt—there were no Queensberry rules for the U. P.—and he was nearly out. He was nearly out even before the game had really started.

Gasping in an agony that seemed hardly less than mortal, he realized now the nature of the odds. The force of that first playful little tap had almost killed him. However, he must rise from the tan. If he didn't look out, those cloven hoofs would be pressing out his life.

There was no time to rest, even for a little while. Let him get up, keep going somehow. He must fight on.

V

HELEN was at the telephone a long ten minutes. She returned to find her guest in a kind of stupor. His legs were stretched out; his eyes shut.

"Such a tiring day he must have had, poor darling!" was her thought, as her strong, cheerful, assured voice brought him back with a start to the moment's pressure.

"I managed to get through to the Office," she said, sitting down again to the table. "Mr. Gage, unfortunately, was not there. And, really"—a clear note of vexation began to strike through the optimism this woman of the world imposed habitually upon herself—"sometimes they can be very trying, even in Cosmos Alley. I explained what the situation was—told them just what had happened—gave them your word that the U. P. version was hopelessly inaccurate, and that on no account must it appear in tomorrow's *Planet*."

"Yes, yes," he said, faintly.

"Well, Mr. Sub-Editor Wingrove, hidebound little pedant"—the note of vexation was growing more dominant—"said he could not take any responsibility in the matter, but as soon as Mr. Gage arrived he would lay the facts before him."

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"Were you able to find out whether it is their intention to reprint the speech as given in the *Evening Press*?"

"That, of course, is what I tried to do. I put the question, point blank. But I couldn't get anything definite. The fact is I don't think Mr. Wingrave knew, but a sub-editor is like a policeman, he'll never own a limit to his knowledge. He hummed and hawed and grew very Planeto-pontifico, the little donkey. However, I clinched the matter finally by making him promise to ring me up as soon as Mr. Gage came in."

"What time is he expected?"

"As a rule, he looks in at the Office between ten and eleven."

"When does the paper go to press?"

"About midnight—the first edition."

Endor looked at his watch. "Only five minutes to nine at present."

"There's any amount of time." The note of reassurance was very stimulating. "And if we can't get something definite out of them in the course of the next two hours, I'll go down to the office and see Mr. Gage myself. Now, let me get you some coffee and a little of the Club brandy—if you'll condescend to it—and then I'll see what can be done with the U. P."

"Please, please, finish your dinner before you do anything further."

"There's not a moment to lose with the U. P.," she said decisively. "I tried to get through five minutes

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ago, but the line was engaged. The provincial *Mercury* goes to press at eleven, and they may raise all sorts of difficulties. After Mr. Sub-Editor Wingrove, one foresees big trouble in Universe Lane. However, the *Mercury* isn't the *Planet*. All the same, the U. P. is the U. P., and every moment counts."

Again she left the table, in spite of all that Endor could do to detain her, gave orders to a servant, and returned at once to the telephone box. Half stunned as Endor still was by the enemy's first blow, he had never admired this woman's virile sense so much. What a prize he had won! As the thought came to him now, it was balm for a deep wound. Quite apart from her attraction and her charm such courage and such competence were beyond price to a public man.

Close upon that reflection came one less happy. This rare woman belonged to the enemy's camp. It was so like the Colossus to have this fine instrument under his hand. Therein lay one of the secrets of his power. And what could be clearer evidence of his Machiavelian quality? How artful the mask he had contrived for his purposes, when even the feminine intuitions of a Helen Sholto were so much at fault that she could bring herself blindly to serve him! To her Saul Hartz was not merely an honest man, he was a hero, a demigod.

By the time he had drunk some coffee, and sipped a little brandy, he began to feel more himself. Better able to look the situation in the face, if not to grapple

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with it, he began mentally to recite his secret formula. *The gods approve the depth, and not the tumult of the soul.* Never had this incantation been known to fail. More than once, even as a boy, it had enabled him to hitch his poor, at times half crazy, wagon to a star.

It did so now. When Helen returned to the room which the other diners had already forsaken, she found him calm. Her ten minutes' absence had wrought in him a palpable change for the better.

"Some pow-wow with the U. P." Her laugh was light, but it could not quite conceal a powerful undercurrent of annoyance. "Mr. Fuller himself! Up till now, one has always had a high respect for his intelligence, but really he can be crass!"

"To order—no doubt."

"No," she said quickly, "believe me, there is not the slightest reason to think that." He was forced to admire a loyalty that would admit no breath of innuendo. "I am convinced it is no more than the red tape of the high official. The truth is, of course, they are all terribly afraid of the Chief."

"That's easily understandable."

"Most unluckily in this case, they simply decline to act without his explicit orders."

"What! They take it upon themselves to publish a speech that has never been made. And they know, of course, that I have to speak to-morrow at Hellington."

"Yes, I told them all that. But the rule of the

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office forbids their canceling a special wire—unless they have Mr. Hartz's own authority to do so."

"Quite!" The voice of Endor grew grim. "And they don't need to be told that it may be absolutely impossible to get that authority by eleven o'clock."

"Of course. I made a strong point of that. Finally, I got Mr. Fuller's promise to keep your speech off the machines until a quarter to twelve. That is the very latest moment he can allow. But at least it gives us a little more time in which to do something."

"Pray, what can one do?"

"We must get through at once to the Chief himself."

"To Hartz?"

"Yes, to the mountain! Miss Mahomet is now going to ring up Carlton House Terrace."

Before Endor could interpose any real effort to hold her back, she was off again to the telephone.

The Club brandy continued to soothe his fretted nerves, but the calmer he grew, the higher his conviction mounted that the plot was deep laid, and that one woman, of no matter what will or what capacity, would not be allowed to undo it. All the same, it would be instructive to see how the game was played. The predestined victim could take at least a morbid zest in observing the workings of "the machine." It had hardly started to move as yet, but all too soon his head would be in the basket.

Helen was back this time in three minutes. She looked decidedly crestfallen.

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"Such bad luck! Of course, one guessed he'd be dining out. But they don't know where. At one of his clubs, they think, and he may have gone on to the opera. Still, they can't say. They only know that he may return at any time from now on until after midnight."

Endor smiled rather sadly. "Never mind. Let us accept the omen. There can be no contending with Destiny."

"On the contrary," she said bravely, fighting his fatalism, "I have fully made up my mind to hunt down the Chief in the next two hours—wherever he is to be found. Only he can stop the *Planet* and the U. P."

"He may decline to do so—even if you run him to earth."

"But why in the world should you think that?" Her voice was full of challenge. "An honest man is bound—is simply bound—to stop them."

"I agree," said Endor, abstractedly. "I humbly beg the pardon of the Colossus."

"Please beg mine—for thinking—thinking—thinking!"

He kissed her hand. "I'm hardly myself to-night," he said.

"You've had a really tiresome day," she said, gently; "what with a journey to Blackhampton and back again—not to mention the luncheon, the presentation, and now this horrid affair! You look quite worn out."

Recognizing that he must pull himself together, he

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proceeded rather heroically to do so. He was upheld, moreover, by Helen's strength of purpose, the working of her active will, of her high and keen intelligence. And yet, at the back of everything, he felt that all they did would be futile. This was only a beginning, the first turn of the wheel. Now that a cog had caught him, the devil's work would go on until his life had been crushed out. But she could not be expected to know that. And in this early phase he ought not to make any such admission, even to himself. It was weak. No matter what happened he must go down fighting.

"What's on to-night at the opera?" said Helen. Under her chair lay the discarded *Evening Press*. She picked it up. "The Russian ballet. He is quite likely to be there. If he is, he may not be home before midnight."

For a moment she considered the question in its various aspects. And then she said, "I'd better go there and see if I can find him."

Endor shook his head. "Looking," he said, "for a pin in a truss of hay to search for people at the opera."

"He has a box. More than once he's lent it to me. If he's there, I'll find him."

A growing sense of the futility of all they could do was now overpowering Endor. But he was forced to admire the noble zeal which was determined not to leave one thing undone.

Knowing argument to be vain, he was content merely

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to insist upon the finishing of the meal before she did anything else. But it was only under protest that she could be brought to do even that. If Mr. Hartz was not at the opera, the sooner they learned that fact the better.

VI

ENDOR, against his private judgment and the will of Helen, accompanied her to Covent Garden. She was sure that after such a day he ought to go straight to bed. Curiously temperamental, she knew him to be, but never had she seen him so completely "bowled out." Like all people who live on their nerves, he was poised on a very fine thread; yet this threat of collapse was hardly justified by the thing that had occurred. He saw in it more than the facts seemed on the surface to warrant. She, on the contrary, was sure that a word from the Chief would put the whole thing right.

It was ten o'clock when they reached Covent Garden. Helen, by dint of tact amounting to diplomacy which she brought to bear on divers officials, was able at last to send one of them with an urgent message to Mr. Hartz's box. Soon, however, the answer came that Mr. Hartz was not there, and that to the best of the messenger's information he had not been there that evening.

A rebuff, for which Helen was half prepared, left

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her undaunted. They turned down the street to Universe Lane, on the off-chance that the *Mercury* might be able to throw light on the whereabouts of the great man. This the *Mercury* could not do; nor was the Office itself in the adjacent Cosmos Alley able to provide a clue to the movements of the august controller of the U. P.

"We'll now draw his clubs," said Helen, undefeatedly. "He may be at the Game in Piccadilly playing bridge. Or he may be in Pall Mall smoking a quiet cigar at the Imperium."

Both, alas! were drawn blank. The Colossus was not nor had been that evening at either. "Dead out of luck, aren't we?" said Helen. "It's very vexing."

One other course only occurred to her now. That was to go on to Carlton House Terrace, and if Mr. Hartz had not returned home to await his arrival. They went there accordingly only to learn that he had not yet come in; moreover, so uncertain, as a rule, were his nocturnal movements that the butler did not care to commit himself as to the hour his master was likely to do so. "May be here any moment, miss, or he may even not be here at——" The butler's discretion did not allow him to complete his sentence.

"Well, I'll wait for him," said Helen, with an air of quiet decision, "for an hour, at any rate." She glanced at a watch on her wrist. "Nearly eleven already."

She went down the steps to the taxi and John Endor.

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To him she made her intention known. "And you," she said, "must go straight home to bed. You are fagged out. Now mind you don't worry about this. A word from the Chief will clear up everything. Forget it all. Promise me you will. And for my part I promise that it shall be put right. Good-night."

"But how will you get home?"

"My tube to South Kensington runs till one o'clock. And I'm quite used to being out late. Good-night."

"Darling!" he whispered, hoarsely. "You darling!"

She stood a moment by the curb to watch him drive away.

VII

AS Helen was shown into Saul Hartz's library a clock on the chimneypiece struck eleven.

"May I get you anything, miss?" said the butler, to whom she was well known.

"Thank you, Jennings—no." She shivered slightly; it was a chill September night.

Jennings gave the fire a poke and retired.

Helen took a book from a table, turned up a reading lamp and sat down. At first so strong was the current of her thought that she did not look at the book. Her whole mind was fixed upon the forty precious minutes that could be allowed for Mr. Hartz's return. If he tarried beyond that time it might be too late for him to be of use—at any rate, so far as the U. P. was concerned. In regard to the *Planet* he might, perhaps, be allowed another two hours.

Severe good sense forbade giving her thoughts much rein. Worry was not going to help. Besides, she had one of those disciplined minds, which, in spite of the moment's pressure, are not allowed to riot. She looked at the book in her hand. Its title was *Essays in Contribution to a Permanent Peace*, its author, John Endor.

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Publication was not due for another fortnight, but an advance copy had been sent already to the *Planet* by the book's publishers in the hope of an early review.

Coincidence, brain wave, sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth sense, had drawn her fingers subconsciously, in semidarkness to this volume. That it was now in her hand was not due to the fact that she had read the title on the cover. The book's coming open at this particular place was less a fruit of chance than of the fact that a marker had been inserted.

A mere glance disclosed that much of page 204 was heavily underscored in red ink.

"The most acute problem of this vexed time is the ever-growing power of the newspaper press. Legislation of a drastic kind is needed to cope with certain newspaper 'bosses' in Great Britain and America and their combinations, national and international, of periodicals, agencies, special correspondents and their sinister antennae, which persistently foul at the source the wells of truth. So long as the infernal machinery which creates and molds public opinion and now aspires to govern the world can be set in motion by the Luciferian minds which control it, minds whose sole merit is a prodigious development of the modern business brain and its infinite capacity for combination and adjustment, hope of a stable peace on any of the five continents of this unlucky planet is out of the question. It cannot be said too often that such an engine as the

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Universal Press is a power for evil and a dire menace to civilization."

To the eyes that read these words they were written in letters of fire. They seemed to burn themselves in Helen's brain. Could this terrible indictment be true? Was it justified? At least it was the considered verdict of the man she had promised to marry. And it was directed against one who had her whole allegiance, one who crowned with a princely reward her loyal labors.

The Chief had many foes. So much was known to her. But like most other people she had been willing to regard that fact as a tribute to the peculiar nature of his talent. Saul Hartz's enemies were the first to own that his genius had enabled him to get so many strings into his hand that he was able to interfere too intimately with the inner workings of the body politic. He had made such a "corner" in public opinion and the subterranean forces which mold it that he had been able to upset the true balance of government throughout the world. Acute minds saw the time coming when the U. P. would have all nations at its mercy.

Helen Sholto knew that sinister charges had been brought against a portentous machine. But to her they had always remained vague. Now, however, they were taking shape. Once she had heard Mr. Hartz stigmatize John Endor as a fanatic. The moment was at hand when the two men must be

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weighed in the scales. Which was in the right? Helen felt that her whole career was involved in the answer about to be given.

Under which king, Bezonian? The words seemed to come to her out of the upper air. It was as if they sounded in the delicate ear of her spirit. Before, however, she could trace them to their source she was terribly startled. Someone had entered the room unperceived. With a shiver she woke to a perception of the fact that the Colossus stood looking at her.

VIII

THERE was something almost feline in the movements of Saul Hartz. So cat-footed was his progress about the Office that he was continually taking his staff by surprise. It made for efficiency, no doubt, this liability to be overlooked and incidentally "to be fired" at short notice; but in the opinion of the more Olympian spirits who lived under his ægis such tactics were hardly worthy of one so august. They were content to suffer them all the same. Saul Hartz in everything insisted on being a law unto himself.

He was very much a law unto himself to-night.

"What do you make of it?" So like the man to get through at once, without preface or apology, to a leading question. The book, at that moment, was the one thing that mattered to the Colossus. "Bright fellow that?" He did not disdain to answer his own question; it was his method, as a rule, of asking another. "But!" He tapped a finger of rue, half humorous, half melodramatic upon the center of an immense forehead, "just a weeny!" As he drummed again an odd puckering of the eyelids somehow became truly comic. "I'm sorry to have to say so."

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Helen rose rather nervously from her chair. She was never quite at her ease in this man's presence. Few were. Before she could muster wits enough to say anything, Saul Hartz had gone on developing his theme in the hushed, far-away voice which only one person at a time was ever able to hear and yet in the ear of that person every syllable was like a bell. "Madness in the mother's family. Got his *dossier*—dear fellow! Brilliant at Oxford. At Eton, too. Geared a little too high, just a little too high—that's all. Great pity! A second Gladstone might have been so useful just now. But"—the shrug of the Colossus almost seemed in the tranced eyes of Helen to set the cosmos whirling—"over the verge already. Dear fellow!"

The finality of that gentle, rather eerie voice turned her soul faint. She could not repress a shudder. The sense of fate as adumbrated in the personality of this man was overpowering.

"Dear fellow!" He developed his theme with a cadence ever-recurring, yet of a slightly fantastic irrelevance, like a *leit-motif* of the later Wagner. "You've seen his speech, I daresay, to his constituents. Proud people—they must be—dear fellow! Mother, you know, was one of the mad Dinneford lot."

So intense was his absorption in his subject that it might be said to evoke an atmosphere. The room itself became submerged in a miasma that was almost deadly. Helen had a sensation of being stifled by a lurking, unknown force. It was very difficult to inter-

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pose a word. By the time she was able to do so, mischief had been wrought.

"Don't you wonder why I'm here," she said, "at this hour?"

"To own the *Planet*," he laughed, "is to wonder at nothing."

"I want your help in a matter of great importance."

"Aha!" There came at once an entire change of tone and manner that was charming. "Sit down again in that chair, and tell me just precisely what I can do." Of a sudden he had put on the cloak of an indulgent father. When he spoke like that to any one, there was no resisting him.

Helen automatically obeyed. "It's about Mr. Endor's speech." She plunged in *medias res*. With those eyes, their light ever changing, fixed upon her, she lost the power to order her words artistically. "I have his assurance that he has been misreported."

"Ah!" The slight exclamation was curiously, almost affectionately, gentle.

"He's so upset!" A feminine urgency of tone was the oddest contrast. "Almost every word he used has in some strange way been given another meaning. For instance, the final phrase as given in the *Evening Press* is 'I believe in the Sword.'"

"Yes, I noticed that." The tone had all the kindness of an old-fashioned pedagogue patting on the head a favorite pupil. "A little bold perhaps just now, but striking . . . really quite striking!"

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"But it was never used. What he did say was, 'I believe in the Word.' "

"Ah—the 'Word'—'I believe in the Word.' Quite so. Hardly so effective. Everybody has believed in the 'Word' since the time of Moses. But the 'sword,' it takes a big man just now—just at the moment—to believe in the sword."

"He doesn't believe in it, that's the whole point." Helen's voice grew a little strained. "It's a mistake, just a ghastly mistake. On no account, he says, must the speech be circulated. It will do so much harm, not only in this country, but in America, where he has so many friends."

"So many friends in America. How interesting!" Again the head of the good boy received a gentle, fatherly pat.

"Don't you see—that a speech like that—may undo a reputation—a reputation that it has taken years—years—to build up?"

"You think so?" The soul of a courtier was in the throbbing warmth of that faint whisper. "Well, you are always right." What in the mouth of any one else would have been a gross compliment became in that of the Colossus a sober presentment of fact.

"It is of vital importance that the speech, at any rate the U. P. version, shall not appear in to-morrow's *Planet* or *Mercury*."

"Quite." Mr. Hartz nodded indulgently. "One ap-

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preciates that . . . at least . . . one appreciates his feeling about it . . . dear fellow!"

"He has an important meeting at Hellington tomorrow."

"Quite." Again the indulgent nod.

"And the U. P. must circulate an unconditional withdrawal to overtake as quickly as possible the harm it has already done."

There was not an instant's hesitation. "If he wants that, he's entitled to have it certainly."

"But there's so little time," said Helen urgently. "It is only with the utmost difficulty that Mr. Fuller has been persuaded to keep the provincial *Mercury* off the machines until a quarter to twelve, in the hope of being able to get your permission to omit the speech altogether. There's only five minutes now, I'm afraid."

"Much may happen in five minutes at the headquarters of the planetary bodies." The playfulness of the Colossus was delightful. It was also reassuring. For it had been said of him that inside five minutes he was fully competent to knock Saturn out of the firmament and put it back again.

"Have I your authority to stop the *Mercury*?" Her eagerness was a little pathetic.

"Why, of course,—of course." The tone was thisledown.

"If I may use your telephone——" She was on her feet, the woman of action.

"Sit down, please, and go on reading his clever book

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while I myself speak a little word to the Office. These rubs will arise, don't you know, in the best regulated families, as Lucifer, Son of the Morning, is said to have remarked on a much-celebrated occasion to President Wilson." With the air of a very kindly, rather boyish, old gentleman having a game of romps with a favorite grandchild, he forced her back to her chair and her book. And then with a kind of elephantine humor he made for the door.

At its threshold, with a hearty laugh, he turned again. "The revised version of this priceless old-world story is that it was Mr. President who really made the remark to the Eldest of the Sons of Time in old John Milton's—or was it old John Morley's?—hearing. However, the point is not material at the moment. A little word with the Office."

With the pleasant chuckle of one basking agreeably in the light of his own humor, he went out of the room.

IX

WHEN the door closed, Helen began to feel that she could breath again. The room was large, high-ceiled, well-ventilated; but the Colossus had seemed to absorb every molecule of air there was in it. In this mood of expansion he was truly formidable. No matter what his detractors had to say of him, and they said much and said it bitterly, it was never denied that Saul Hartz was a power.

As soon as the door had closed, however, Helen for the first time in a two years' intercourse, brought herself to shape a question. Was it really wise to trust this man so blindly? Where there was so much smoke must there not be also a certain amount of fire?

Encompassed by that dynamic force the higher nerve-centers were a little apt to fail. And to submit the all-embracing mind of Saul Hartz to the common scale of right and wrong was hardly feasible. Right and wrong in that paradoxical cosmos of a brain, which yet formed a key to the whole objective modern world, seemed interchangeable terms. She recalled hearing him say more than once, that Right in the midday

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special was Wrong in the evening edition. Certainly he made a jest of everything. He seemed to believe in nothing, to respect nobody; yet in her dealings with the man himself she had always found him scrupulously kind, wonderfully considerate, nobly generous.

To-night, in this chance visit, she had never felt so much out of her depth, she had never been swept so completely off her feet. John Endor was no common man, but this Chief to whom she owed allegiance had somehow a quality which seemed to raise him almost beyond good and evil.

In a time which to Helen was unexpectedly brief, Mr. Hartz was back in the room. "So much for that," he said with the light, casual air that was always charming.

Helen rose at once. "Ever so many thanks," she said, wholeheartedly. "I was quite sure it had only to be mentioned." A look of gratitude drove the words right home. "And now I must fly. Good-night—and again, thank you."

The passage to the door, however, was barred, playfully, if resolutely, by the genial spread of the Colossus: "Now please don't run away. Sit down and tell me a little about yourself."

"There's the last train from Piccadilly Circus to think of."

"'Tisn't twelve yet. The South Kensington tube is open till one o'clock."

It was flattering to think that so great a man should

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carry in his mind her address, but it was like him not to forget the simplest of facts. "Besides, I take all responsibility for getting you home."

"And accept it, I hope"—yielding with a laugh—"if I am late to-morrow at the Office."

"Let me get you a cup of tea or something." He pressed a bell. "I'm going to have a whisky and soda myself."

Helen declined refreshment.

To the servant who entered Mr. Hartz said: "Please tell Jennings the brougham will be wanted in half an hour."

Duly armed with a "nightcap" which contained a great deal more soda than whisky the Colossus sat cosily down by the fire immediately opposite Helen. A man of fifty-two, his manner towards this singularly attractive woman of six-and-twenty was so whimsically, yet frankly, paternal, that something beyond disparity of years seemed necessary to sustain it.

An odd sensation, unlike anything she had ever felt before, came subtly upon Helen. This man's personality was geared very high, but unlike that of John Endor it seemed to be a fixed quantity, not liable to fluctuate. In his case the nerves didn't show. To talk to, when he chose, he was delightful. Just now, perhaps half deliberately, he chose.

If the question was not impertinent, why was she concerned so particularly for John Endor's reputation?

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Her shrewdness had allowed her to foresee that such a question might arise. She was half prepared to answer it. As the necessity came, however, she yielded to a slight embarrassment which did not make her attraction less.

"We are going to be married."

Saul Hartz gave a sharp upthrow of the head.

"Lucky fellow!" The words of the Colossus were almost as quick as thought itself. "Devilish lucky fellow! I *do* congratulate him—upon my word!" The purr of the gentle voice had a warmth of overtone that in the ear of Helen was delicious. She felt the blood pass over her cheeks in a wave. Such a voice as that must have opened the heart of any woman. He had the power, when he chose, of simulating an intense humanity.

"Won't you congratulate me?" she ventured.

"Why, of course—of course." The purr had not changed and yet, in a way that almost impinged on the mysteries of counterpoint, she was made to guess rather than to feel that a vital something was no longer there.

Madness in the mother's family. Those five words descended upon her from the upper air. Almost in the same instant the open book on her knee slid to the carpet.

She had not time to recover the book before Mr. Hartz was on his feet politely restoring it to her.

"Clever, you know." He seemed to think aloud.

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"A mind at work there." The book was placed lovingly in her hand. "Only one hopes——"

Sighing delicately he returned to his chair. His air had now become that of one who has to reconcile a very good heart with the sterner impulses of duty.

"You hope?" She caught up the broken phrase with an eagerness that was a little pitiful.

"Nothing, nothing."

She shivered slightly. *Madness in the mother's family.*

"Wonderful faculty he has"—the Colossus seemed again to be thinking aloud—"of swaying audiences. Rather picked audiences, too. And as men are reckoned nowadays, hardly more than a boy."

"He's thirty-eight."

"Almost an infant prodigy!" The deep laugh was very good to hear. "I never heard Gladstone. Before my day. But one or two of the fathers who go back to prehistoric times say that your young man is such another, but that the People's John—proud title the People's John—and only thirty-eight—has one shot in his game that the G. O. M. never had. It's the master-shot, too, believe me. Humor. Cool-drawn humor. With that in your bag, you've always a chance of holding out under bogey. Don't you agree?"

"Yes, I hope he has it," said the cautious Helen. "But whether on the platform it quite 'gets over,' as they say in the theater, one is never quite sure. When-

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ever one hears him one is always dominated by his tremendous moral enthusiasm."

"There's your Gladstone. Always *the* card, of course. That's why good judges think he may go a very long way."

Helen's heart took fire. These were big words in the mouth of the Colossus. "You think that?" She looked eagerly across at him. "Really and truly you think that?"

The immediate answer of the great man was slowly to produce a cigar case. "No use offering you a cigarette. I know you don't smoke. Wise—very wise woman." As he spoke he chose a cigar, cut off the end, lit it.

"Do you really think he'll go far?" she persisted.

"The pundits seem pretty unanimous."

"But you—yourself—personally?"

The Colossus drew tentatively at his cigar. "Pray, who am I—a mere newspaper man—to hold an opinion—on such a matter? I can only tell you that Mr. Ransom thinks so and he, as you know, held office before the Deluge."

"But you—yourself?" She was determined to nail him down. "Do you think John Endor may one day be Prime Minister?"

"Well, since you ask me"—each word was like a drip of ice-cold water—"in my humble opinion, I don't."

Something in the deliberate voice clutched her by

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the throat. As his eye caught hers and held it, she drew her breath quickly in.

"Since you ask me." The tone was sweet apology, "Only my poor opinion. Really, I don't pretend to know. Why should one?"

"You think," said Helen, "that . . . he . . . might . . . ?"

"My dear, I think nothing," It was the father speaking again. "One can't help feeling he's a rather high explosive, that's all. And of course, the mother——"

"The mother!" Her breath came and went in a little gasp.

Watching her closely he saw her turn very white. "I beg your pardon!" He was very quick, very adroit. "But you pin me down. And you mean so much to one, you know. In the Office we have come quite to depend on you. I can't help thinking of you almost as a girl of my own."

The simple words sank deep. They were music. This man had always had her loyal admiration. And now, as she sat facing him, she began to feel awed by a sense of all that he had done for her.

Suddenly a picture was flashed before her mind. Far away in America, in a backwater of a southern state, she saw her old parents hard pressed by modern conditions, but whose lot for nearly two years now she had been able to lighten with a liberal slice from her salary. It was going to be a terrible wrench to give

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up her life at the Office. And then John himself, would he, could he . . . ?

The man who sat opposite seemed to read every thought she had.

“Hardly a matter upon which one is entitled to speak.”

The father again. “But, as I say, you mean so much to us in the Office—so please—please look before and after.”

A sense of being overcome by a great spirit afflicted her now. Here was an infinite power. She felt her defenses giving. The walls of the large room were beginning to press upon her. She was alone with the man in his own house, it was after midnight, she was at his mercy. Such fear was unworthy, but she was seized by a fierce desire to escape. There was the unknown to reckon with. At its beck, and under its fires, even her most sacred instincts were in danger of being subverted.

X

NEXT morning, as the clock struck eleven, the Chief entered his private room at the Office.

Punctuality, said his many biographers, was a cardinal fact in an amazing life. But Saul Hartz knew better.

As the Colossus sat down at his table, the mere look of him would have been enough to repute any theory so prosaic. The key of personality lay deeper. It was to be found in the eyes, curiously hooded like those of a bird of prey. In those undisclosed depths lurked the faculty of seeing into the future.

It was this rather terrible power that had made Saul Hartz the thing he was. He could afford to smile at the array of mental and moral virtues his Lives insisted upon. Well he knew how completely they were transcended by the fact that his birth had been attended by a Fairy.

A tray set on his blotting pad contained a mail of thirty unopened but judiciously sorted letters. He turned over each one in turn. In several cases the back of the envelope told all he needed to know about them. Others aroused a languid interest, a mild curi-

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osity; life had few thrills to offer Saul Hartz. Two letters, however, among the pile were able to fix his attention. One had ultra thick paper embossed with the monogram of Royalty; the other was a black-sealed, black-edged envelope, registered and marked "private."

Somehow, the mere look of the second letter intrigued the Colossus. His manner of laying it down proved that. But as a minor exercise in the art of self-mastery—it amused him to play these little pranks upon himself—he placed it carefully at the bottom of the pile. Then he opened the royal envelope.

A considerable personage, in his own hand, fair and clerkly, warmly thanked "My dear Hartz" for his efforts on behalf of the London hospitals. Previous campaigns in the newspapers had raised great sums, but the guiding spirit of the Universal Press was urgently asked to open a special fund to meet the needs of the coming winter.

This letter in hand, Mr. Hartz pondered rather less than a minute, and then he pressed a bell-button fixed in the side of his desk sharply three times.

The summons was answered at once by a youngish, bald, dome-headed man who wore the serious, rather pinched look that accompanies an intense preoccupation with money.

"Good morning, Mumby." The Chief greeted cheerfully the financial member of his Cabinet. Then he tossed him the letter. Before Mr. Mumby, in order to do justice to this document, could fix gold-rimmed

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eyeglasses to a nose with a narrow ridge, the Colossus gave a soft chuckle.

"A slight—a very slight irritation of the lobe of the left ear"—while he plucked at that organ his eye was fixed on Mr. Mumby's face—"tells me that an irruption of Popocatapetl is about to occur. I hope you appreciate its significance."

Even Mr. Mumby, schooled as he was in the more recondite ways of the Chief, was at a loss. The Colossus, however, was kind enough at once to enlighten him. "Tell me," he said, "what is the price of National Mexican Thirds?"

"They closed last night," said Mr. Mumby, who carried all little matters of that kind in his head, "at forty-six and an eighth, rather sellers."

The Chief tapped an excellent set of teeth with a black lead pencil, a favorite trick when engaged in thinking constructively. "Suppose you go a bear—a modest bear?" Again he plucked at his left ear, but this time a smile famous upon five continents accompanied the action.

"When shall I cover, sir?" said Mr. Mumby, impassively.

"Twelve o'clock on Thursday," said the Colossus. "And you can start the fund of His Nibs with the proceeds."

"A thousand pounds, sir?" Mr. Mumby was more impassive than ever.

"Yes. A thousand pounds from the proprietor of

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the *Planet* newspaper. That, I think, should meet the case—to begin with, at any rate.”

For the third time the Colossus plucked a little whimsically at his left ear. Mr. Mumby bowed discreetly and retired.

XI

THE Chief turned again to his letters. That which he opened next was not the one that was really going to interest him. The place for it was still the bottom of the pile. He felt this *bonne bouche* was going to interest him so much that he would keep it until the very end.

All the same a mild surprise was contained in the second letter. It was an invitation for a week-end in the country, "to meet some rather interesting people." Mr. Hartz permitted himself a faint smile. The socially gifted Mrs. Carburton was a power in the land, but emphatically she belonged to "the other camp." Strictly speaking, the Colossus was far too big to belong to a camp. Mrs. Carburton did not belong to one either; but of late years they had not set each other's genius. The famous châtelaine of Doe Hill made no secret of her belief that the U. P. had deliberately wrought the ruin of one of her rather numerous protégées. She was known to have a deep dislike for Saul Hartz. But she was important enough as the world went for an invitation to Doe Hill to be not without piquancy even for him.

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Should he accept it? Why not? His attitude of slightly contemptuous indifference towards women in general was his attitude towards this woman, but she was a mine of information, and she made a hobby of gracing her table with the most interesting people in Europe. And for those alive to the lure of sex, her power of attraction was undoubted. Few men would have denied that Rose Carburton was, in her way, a siren.

Mr. Hartz was still in the valley of decision, this letter in hand, when Helen Sholto came into the room. Some two years before, on one of his brief but frequent trips across the Atlantic, he had found this remarkably able girl doing odd jobs in the New York office. Taken at once by her personality, he had brought her to London as one of several confidential secretaries, to whom, however, he never opened his mind; and in a post that was no sinecure she had discovered a feminine quick-thinking competence that had proved of high value. Moreover, Helen herself, with her charm, her high spirits, her good looks, seemed to relieve even the gloom and the grime of Cosmos Alley.

The great man had this morning, as usual, a cordial greeting, a benign smile, to offer her. But it hardly called for his abnormal powers of observation to see at once that something was wrong. His greeting was returned with a slight bow. Her face was grave and set. And in prompt response to the question in his

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eyes, she said without a word of preface in a low voice, "I wish to give formal notice to terminate my engagement here."

Saul Hartz's answer was to drum gently with a pencil on his blotting pad.

"I think it's cruel!" Her eyes filled suddenly with tears. "The speech is in all the papers this morning. And the *Planet* has a leading article . . . after your promise!"

The Colossus gazed at her impassively, and then he said, in that peculiar soft tone that now made her shiver. "Sit down, my dear child, and compose yourself. There's something I have to say to you."

Against her own reluctant will, Helen took a chair at the side of his desk, towards which he pointed.

"To begin with," he said, "let me apologize for a mistake—a regrettable mistake. The instructions I gave hurriedly last night over the telephone were misunderstood. But I want you to believe"—the soft voice was now fused with feeling—"that that mistake, deplorable as it is, after all, is only of minor importance."

Helen could only gasp. Of only minor importance! How dare he say that!

"You see, on inquiry, we learn that the speech was made as reported."

"But Mr. Endor declares that he never used the words attributed to him," was Helen's answer, quick and stern.

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"So I understand. But is Mr. Endor's memory to be trusted? that is the point. He spoke without notes; he has no evidence of what he said impromptu, almost, as it were, on the spur of the moment, at a champagne luncheon. Many a man has wished to take back words, uttered under such circumstances. You see, the difficulty that arises in this case is"—the hooded eyes were opening and fastening upon her—"that three members of our staff who, by the way, were the only reporters there, are in unanimous agreement as to the words Mr. Endor used. They may not be the words Mr. Endor intended to use, but that is hardly a matter for the U. P."

With those eyes fixed on her, Helen felt a chill spread through her veins.

"You see, my dear child,"—the father once more—"the evidence so far as we are concerned is conclusive. Three trusted members of the U. P. staff against one . . . shall I say . . . ra . . . ther . . . no, no, I beg your pardon . . . I'd forgotten he's your fiancé!"

"Last night," Helen managed to say, in spite of the tentacles that pinned her now, "you promised to contradict the U. P. version, and withdraw it from circulation."

"So I did," was the gentle answer. "But I may not have realized . . . quite adequately realized that our version was the only one at that moment in existence. Moreover, it places us in an awkward . . . an immensely awkward position to have to go back on our

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own people . . . whom we trust implicitly. However,"—the intense pain in her eyes did not escape him—"a promise is a promise, even if unwisely given. The U. P. is going to publish Mr. Endor's disclaimer, and if I may say so . . . if I may claim so much for it . . . it is going to have the signal generosity not to divulge the facts upon which, in my humble judgment, it is fully entitled to rely. Indeed, having regard to the special . . . the very special circumstances,"—a note of magnanimity was now in the voice of the Colossus—"I give you my word that the U P. will not put in this very strong evidence on its own behalf unless Mr. Endor should happen to think that an action can lie against it. In that event, of course, I'm afraid it will have to be a case of *cet animal est très méchant!*"

"What good," said Helen, "can this contradiction do Mr. Endor now? The lie has gone round the world and the truth can never overtake it."

"Lie is a hard word," said the Colossus, softly.

"I must believe the man who made the speech," Helen's voice trembled. "I do believe him."

"We are in a very difficult position, but you can depend on our doing what we can to set the matter right."

"It may be too late," said Helen. "Personally, I feel that it is. Millions who read the original report in England and America will never see the contradiction. A speech of that kind may take a man years to live down."

"Well, well,"—never had the voice of Saul Hartz

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sounded more suasive—"the U. P. must see what it can do in a truly difficult case. And, in the meantime, let me beg you, as much for your own sake as for ours, not to desert the old ship."

A second time Helen's eyes filmed with tears. "I feel," she said, "that I can never work with you again."

The silence which now constrained them was broken at last by the hushed, far-away voice which always seemed to hypnotize her. "Have you realized what it means? Do you quite see all that such a step involves?"

Mournfully she owned that never again did she expect to earn a thousand dollars a month.

"And John Endor, I believe, is by no means a rich man."

Helen believed so too. But she permitted herself a modest hope that she might still be able to earn a good salary.

"In journalism?"

"Yes."

"That, my dear child,"—once more the father,—“is a point on which it really becomes my duty to disillusion you. If you break with us, your career in journalism is at an end."

XII

THE words of the Colossus, spoken delicately though they were, came to Helen like a blow over the heart. But she had the dour courage of the born fighter.

"Surely that remains to be seen." For the first time in the course of a two years' friendship with Saul Hartz, a chord of antagonism rang in Helen's voice.

The Colossus paused a moment to look at her. "True, my dear." Of a sudden the tone had grown almost deprecatory. "But I do want you to look before and after. You contemplate a very serious step."

Helen agreed that for herself such a step must prove serious indeed.

"For both of us, my dear. You will be very much missed here."

She was touched by this magnanimity and also flattered by it, for she knew it to be the frank expression of his mind. The Chief did not want to part with her, that was clear. She had reason to think she had been of use to him and that he had always liked her personally. Certainly from the day of their first meeting

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in New York she had received exceptional kindness and consideration at his hands.

As far as Saul Hartz himself was concerned, he had known from the outset that she had first-rate abilities. None understood better than he the value of the feminine mind with its faculty of taking short cuts to deep conclusions. By its intuitive "scrapping" of a thousand-and-one considerations that are apt to fetter the slow-moving male it was able to save time and expenditure of spirit and yet "to get there" just the same.

Helen Sholto, over and beyond an exceptionally quick perception, had now become a highly trained woman of the modern world, a brilliant writer and speaker who understood her own sex. Already she counted with that important but elusive entity, the woman voter. She had, too, powers of organization, a real capacity for handling large affairs. Saul Hartz with his flair in such matters saw that her combination of rare qualities was likely to carry her far.

To the Colossus no one was indispensable, but in certain ways he had come to lean rather heavily on Helen Sholto; and he had made up his mind that she must not be allowed to serve in the enemy's camp.

"I've been making plans for you." Those strange eyes measured hers. "Let me tell you what they are." The husky whisper was now a caress. "Stay with us here and you shall have something big—a plum worth having. As you know, we are planning a new paper for women that we hope to make the finest property

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of its kind in existence. Now suppose you take control at double your present salary and with a share in the profits?"

Helen was thrilled. Only a woman of ambition could have gone so far already upon the road. This was an opportunity she had foreseen and had been steadily working for. To be in charge of such an undertaking would not only gratify a keen desire; it would be fulfillment almost beyond what she had dared to hope.

She knew that the eyes of Saul Hartz were reading her soul. As far as he was concerned there was hardly such a thing as a secret. And with what uncanny skill he could use his knowledge! The bribe was great. For one of her mental outlook, the refusal of such a bait would be a going-back upon her whole philosophy of life.

"Don't decide at once." The whisper, faint though it was, had a curious power. "But keep the door open . . . keep the door open, that's all we ask."

Helen remained silent. In the presence of this man, immediately under his gaze, within sound of his compelling speech, she was always less than herself. Everybody in the Office felt like that. The most potent members of the staff, and they included heads as hard and brains as "picked" as the world could produce, were seldom able to put up a fight against him. The Colossus dominated all alike.

"You see," Saul Hartz went on, "it was due to me

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that you came over to us here. I've always felt a personal responsibility in regard to you. From the first I believed in you—we believed in each other. You have not disappointed me; I hope I have not disappointed you. But it will hurt me more than I can say, if for a whim, a mere whim, a day-dream, you throw away a really fine career."

To doubt his sincerity was impossible. Every word rang true. And Helen Sholto with his spell upon her was bound to react to the emotion this man had the power to excite. At once her mind went back to the many benefits at his hands, the many delicate kindnesses. She could not forget his faith in her; she could not forget how much she owed him.

While he looked at her all that was clear. He wove a very close web. But he was too adroit to draw the mesh too tight. He was careful not to embarrass her by an appeal to her sense of gratitude.

"Of course, this is just a business proposition—a business arrangement." The sudden release of tension was most welcome to Helen. "*A quid pro quo*, one might even say. We have been mutually useful to each other."

"You have been very good to me." A sense of justice forced her to that simple admission.

"If you really think so,"—he had a wonderful gift for taking instant advantage of every opportunity—"you'll be in no hurry to turn us down."

Her distrust of this man had now grown profound,

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but with that implacable will enfolding her she began to seem a helpless fly in the toils of an enormous spider.

"Take time for thought." He recurred yet again to his theme with the zest of one who knows his own skill and loves its exercise. "The strongest and the wisest of us are liable to moments of weakness in which we may easily come to grief. I'm twice your age and that's my excuse for prosing. But don't throw away the substance for the shadow; don't go back on your whole life for the sake of a heroic gesture. The control of the *Woman's News*, with a combined minimum sale here and in the United States of five million copies a week, is going to be the prize of your profession. Try to realize what such a chance means before you sacrifice it to a chimera."

"John Endor is no chimera," Helen mustered the wit to reply. "He is a great man. You know that as well as I do."

Again he looked at her in the way that had the power of disconcerting everybody.

"A great man *ab ovo* shall we say? But I'm going to be brutally frank." A brief pause was well timed. "He can't stay the course; he's geared too high."

"How is it possible to know that?" said Helen valiantly.

The Colossus laughed. Slowly his eyes unhooded themselves. She felt them strike like the fangs of a cobra. "Dear fellow!" A curious lisp entered that

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remote voice. "Dear fellow, he's down and out already."

For one vital instant Helen's heart seemed to miss its beat. The will must not accept this ukase, but an all-powerful instinct might dethrone it. Not for nothing had this man earned his name. Caught and pinned by his eyes she read what was behind them. Even to the acute, balanced brain of Helen at this moment he began to seem one with destiny itself.

Shivering with an emotion very close to terror she was unable to move until his eyes let her go. Then she got up from her chair.

"Take a few days before you really decide." Quite suddenly his voice changed altogether. "If you are writing, give my love to the old people in the old home."

No other man would have dared that touch of audacity, of jejune cynicism. Helen knew that well enough, yet it didn't make her fear of him less.

Returning no answer for there was none she could give, she asked a question of routine and then, feeling like one over whom a whirlwind had swept, she went to the door.

"Do you mind asking Mr. Gage to come?"

The Chief's reassumption of a formal tone helped her to a becoming exit.

XIII

BENNET GAGE was a conspicuously able member of his race. Every pore of his body, every cell in his brain seemed to lust after "impressions." He lived with his ear to the ground, listening to the pulse of the time. The price in the market of everything was filed for reference in a prehensile mind; the rate per ton for pig iron f. o. b. Sunderland, the exchange on Christiania, or the value of an early Degas, Mr. Gage could tell you offhand. And the information would be the soundest obtainable. Moreover, a man of judgment, Saul Hartz, who was almost incapable of a mistake in such matters, had a great belief in him. From the beginning he had been one of the directing minds at the back of the portentous organization whose secret aim was to dominate the world.

"Well, Gage," was the cheerful greeting of the Colossus, "all the morning journals have sung together."

"I hope, sir, you admired the *Planet* leader." The deference of Mr. Gage was touched ever so lightly with humor.

With odd unexpectedness the Colossus loosed a sud-

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den roar that almost shook Cosmos Alley to its foundations. "My compliments to dear old Dalling. He's quite on his top notch this morning. A full four-ounce packet of desiccated Pecksniff. Enough to turn the stomach of a horse!"

"Is today's meeting at Hellington to be reported?"

"If he is able to hold it, no," was the prompt answer. "If he is not able to hold it, yes."

"And the book? Are we to review it?"

"No. By the way, who are the publishers?"

"Burberry and Walker."

"Refuse all their advertisements until further notice. Who is publishing it in New York?"

"Ireson."

"When?"

"The tenth of next month."

"They had better be stopped. I suppose they can be."

"Oh, yes," Mr. Gage's nod was conclusive. "Ireson is on the red list, fortunately."

"What an egotistical ass this fellow Endor must be." The voice of Saul Hartz had declined suddenly to a whisper. "However, this young man is not the first dweller in fairyland who has committed hari-kari."

With a stealthy smile Mr. Gage agreed.

"So much for that—for the moment," said the Chief, with a little purr of satisfaction. "Now, for more important things. What are we featuring to-night?"

"The attack on the British Consul at Peking."

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The Colossus pursed his lips.

"Must we issue an ultimatum to the Chinese Government?"

"Yes. Give them forty-eight hours to apologize, or take the consequences."

"They'll apologize, of course."

"I'm afraid so, poor brutes! Still, as I told the P. M. last night, it all helps to keep the pot simmering. And sooner or later dear old man Chink will have to be put to it. The trouble is, you see, that Brother Jap will be at the poor old gentleman even if we consent to keep our fingers off him."

Mr. Gage saw that.

"Any particular news this morning?"

The question was lightly asked but before it was answered the face of Bennet Gage became perceptibly older. A look of strain came into a curiously somber face, as he said, "Did you know that Garland is dead?"

"Dead! William Garland!" It was clear that, for a moment, even the Colossus was taken aback. "Why, I was in his company last evening at dinner at Rockingham House. We had a most interesting, a most informative chat about labor conditions all over the world. He was leaving here on Friday for Australia."

"Then he may have arrived already," said Mr. Gage succinctly. "At all events, about half past eleven last night, as he entered the Cosmopolitan vestibule, he fell down dead."

Saul Hartz was visibly startled. He pursed his

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lips for a whistle that did not come. "About half past eleven, you say, in the Cosmopolitan vestibule? Why, an hour before I was talking with him in Park Lane, when he was as hale and cheery as you please."

"Yes, it's all very mysterious," said Mr. Gage, solemnly.

It was clear that Saul Hartz was greatly impressed by this piece of news. There was no longer a trace of lightness in his manner when he said abruptly, after a slight pause: "There'll be an inquest, of course?"

"Oh, yes. The police have already taken charge of the body. But they are extraordinarily reticent."

"They suspect foul play?"

"There seems absolutely nothing to be got out of Scotland Yard. Verity's with them now."

The Colossus frowned. He produced from his waistcoat pocket a toothpick and began to chew it viciously. "We probably know quite as much as they do, or very likely more. But Verity can be trusted, I hope, not to give them cold feet."

"From what he says—he went down to Whitehall before breakfast—they've got cold feet already."

"Oh, they have!" Saul Hartz grew reflective. "Then, in this case, they seem rather more up to time than usual. The fact is, Gage, it's no use disguising that this affair wears a particularly ugly look."

"That, undoubtedly, is Scotland Yard's opinion."

"What do they surmise to be the cause of death?"

"Verity can't get a word out of them."

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Saul Hartz threw up his head sharply. "Very well, see that they don't get a word out of us. That's a game for two and we're in a position to play it as well as most people."

"Judging by the temperature in Whitehall at eight o'clock this morning, Verity is inclined to think they can tell us more than we can tell them. At any rate, we are warned to go slow."

"*Warned* to go slow! What do you mean, Gage?"

"We are to be specially careful how we treat the news so that it may not conflict with the public interest."

"Oh, be damned to that!" The eyes of the Colossus blazed arrogantly. "We shall treat the news as we please. I wonder if they think we are going to take dictation from a pack of old women."

Mr. Gage looked rather dubious.

"By the way," said Saul Hartz, in the sharp crackling tones that were used only on great occasions, "have you spoken to New York? It's possible they know a little more than anybody at the moment."

"Oh, yes, Barrington rang them up as soon as the news came in."

"Quite right. Bright fellow that. I hope he got Manville Lewis himself."

"Yes—Manville Lewis. He didn't think it wise to discuss it with any one else."

"Just so. Had their end anything to tell us?"

"Only that Garland had been warned before he left

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New York last Tuesday that he would not be allowed to proceed to Australia."

"We could have told them that. By the way, I wonder if they know that in Whitehall?"

"Verity suspects so, but he's not sure."

"He's right, no doubt." Saul Hartz spoke keenly. "And that's their reason for making all this fuss. Do you suppose they are up in those other two cases?"

"Kornichef and Yamotoga?"

"Yes."

"Verity thinks they must be. He didn't ask the question but he gave Scotland Yard every opportunity to bring them into the picture. But there was nothing to be got out of it."

"No, I expect not," said the Colossus, impatiently. "However, this thing looks pretty ugly to me."

Mr. Gage agreed.

The silence which followed was rather embarrassing for the editor of the *Planet*. Instinctively, he knew one, at least, of the thoughts that was already in possession of the Chief's mind. For one so expert in the signs as Bennet Gage the face of the man before him was easy to read. As the Colossus sat now at his writing table with eyes shrouded, lips locked like a trap and the tips of his fingers pressed together, he seemed to exude a growing pugnacity. Scotland Yard might be tempted to take this dark thing lying down, but it was not in Saul Hartz's nature to take anything lying down.

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"Gage!" The curious whisper broke the silence at last. "We must go into this. We must go into this fully."

The cock of the editor's head implied rather than expressed a mild dissent. He did not venture upon anything more explicit. It was no use opposing Saul Hartz. One might as well oppose Niagara. Amenable to argument he might be up to a point, but he was a man of volcanic will who owed almost everything to an unrivaled intuition. He had a first-rate mind for affairs, but it was not by taking the advice of others that he had won a unique place in the world.

"Big issues here!" The formidable jowl had unfurled itself from a capacious collar, the brooding eyes had disclosed their fires.

"Yes, I grant that." A slight tremor in Mr. Gage's voice told more than his words. "But it seems to me, if I may be allowed to say so——"

"Go on!" The words were impatient. "You know that in this room you can say anything."

"Well, sir, I would like to say this: It seems to me that you of all men should keep off the grass."

Mr. Gage did not underrate his own prescience, and he knew that Saul Hartz did not underrate it either. But as the editor of the *Planet* uttered these significant words, he had the look of a man who anticipates an explosion. In this, he was not disappointed. But the explosion, when it came, was less devastating than he had feared.

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"Oh, be damned to that, Gage!" The Chief brought his fist down solidly upon the table at which he sat. "We don't allow ourselves here to be intimidated by anything or anybody."

"Quite!" The assent was a little uneasy. "But knowing what we do, knowing what is behind all this, is it altogether politic . . . ?"

"Politically!"

"To take such risks—particularly when they are unnecessary."

"We shall not agree that the risks are unnecessary. It's our clear duty to keep the police—or why not say the Government?—up to the collar."

The editor of the *Planet* cordially agreed, but in the choice of the words which followed he showed great care. "I do feel very strongly," he said, "that faced as we are with two evils, it is our duty to choose the less. The police have asked us to walk delicately, and I really think we ought to do so."

"Why?"

"In the public interest."

The laugh of the Colossus was derisive. "In other words, Bennet Gage finds life too agreeable to endanger it lightly."

That went to the root of the matter, no doubt. But Mr. Hartz softened the thrust a little by offering his cigar case with the air of a good fellow which he had the valuable faculty of assuming on all occasions. As he chose a cigar for himself, he became the soul of

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geniality, but Mr. Gage who knew him only too well was not able to respond.

"Why, you are worse than those duds at Scotland Yard, my friend." The gayety, if not exactly forced, did not seem altogether spontaneous. "If you like, I'll make you a present of a pair of snowboots lined with fur. They are the only things for your complaint. And I hear you can get bedsocks at a reasonable price at Selfridge's white sale."

The Chief lit his cigar. Suddenly he began to smoke furiously. Mr. Gage, who had declined a cigar, indulged in odd, nervous little fumbles with his hands.

"The *Planet* must take a strong line to-morrow." Saul Hartz's tone was plenary. "Report the inquest fully. Have all the known facts in this case and the other two cases got up carefully, and embody them in a series of articles, to synchronize with the inquest. *The Murder of William Garland* will make a good caption. Norton or Lewis—I think perhaps Norton had better write it. Let him come to me in half an hour and I'll give him my ideas on the subject."

Dismissal was in the tone. Saul Hartz had no punctilio with the men he employed, no matter how eminent they might be in their own sphere. Even if he did not parade the fact that he was the most important person in the western hemisphere, he liked it clearly to be understood in all matters of domestic administration that his whim was law.

Bennet Gage was frankly distressed. His regard

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for the Chief was akin to idolatry, but this was a matter on which he felt bound to hold his ground. It was due to them both that he should do so. But it was far from the habit of the Colossus to take advice and the knowledge of this fact often embarrassed those who had to deal with him.

"Must we go into this matter at once?" The question was more tentative than was warranted by Mr. Gage's state of mind, but to come out into the open would be fatal.

"The sooner the better. Marshal all the facts. We have to take a strong line here."

"But the 'murder' of William Garland." Such a nudity of phrase was altogether too much for Bennet Gage. "Even if our information justifies that and even if it is the finding of the Coroner's jury—and one can't believe for a moment that it will be—is it right?—is it in the public interest to run counter to the police?"

"Is it in the public interest to cover up their incompetence? that is the question we have to ask ourselves."

Mr. Gage shook a deferential head. "Not so much their incompetence, it seems to me, as their limitations."

"A distinction without a difference, my friend."

"With all respect, I don't agree. There is reason to believe that they know more than we do. And they have come to the conclusion that they are powerless."

"A conclusion wholly puerile and discreditable."

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"Upon that I offer no opinion. But you remember what Verity said on his return from Tokyo?"

"Yes; and you remember what I said to Verity?"

"I do. But if I may say so, in this business Verity is the man on the spot. And he is most anxious that we should accept guidance in the matter."

Saul Hartz laughed harshly. "The sooner daylight is let into the whole thing, the better—that's my view."

The look of trouble deepened in the editor's face. "May I ask you not to forget that the police are up against the stiffest proposition they have ever had to tackle?"

"Why have you turned devil's advocate, Gage?" Saul Hartz's tone was sharply impatient.

"On public grounds," was the reluctant answer.

"Why, you are as bad as those old women in Whitehall."

"But look what has happened within a year. Three clear cases. One in Tokyo, one in New York, and now one in London. In each case a warning, a disregard of the warning, followed in one instance by a mysterious disappearance, and in the other two by an even more mysterious death."

"Well, no matter what Scotland Yard may say or what it may do, we, at any rate, shall not allow ourselves to be frightened by any kind of fee faw fum."

Mr. Gage shook his head. "This terrible affair," he said weightily, "amply confirms the opinion I have ventured already to express to you that the police are

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up against the most powerful and certainly the most sinister force in the world to-day."

The Chief was frankly annoyed. "Nonsense! I refuse to believe anything of the kind. And in any event, no matter what its power, we are going to fight it. Tell Norton to come to me in half an hour."

The keenly intelligent face of Bennet Gage clouded heavily. With the look of a man who staggers under a blow, he went to the door. But as he got there, he changed his mind. Turning suddenly, he came back several paces into the room. "It's no use, sir." The voice was full of pain. "I know it's a subject on which you won't listen to advice. But it's one also in which I feel I must obey my deepest instinct. Frankly, I haven't your courage. So that if you have fully made up your mind to disregard these warnings, I must ask you to announce in to-morrow's *Planet* that I am no longer its editor."

XIV

BENNET GAGE had delivered an ultimatum. The Colossus was far from expecting it. He had come to look upon the staunch, the tried, the absolutely dependable Gage as a segment of his other self. Saul Hartz would have been the first to own, for he was fundamentally generous, that much of the *Planet's* success was due to the ability of its editor-in-chief; and for himself there was no man on whose services he set a higher value. At the same time he must follow his star. No member of his staff was ever allowed to oppose his will. Advice was sometimes sought, it was sometimes taken, but even a man of Gage's quality could not be permitted to offer it, much less to insist upon it, uninvited.

"You are talking like a fool, Gage, aren't you?" The Colossus was too primitive to weigh his words overmuch at any time; in a crisis his bluntness of phrase seemed to add to his power. "Why go off at half cock, my friend?"

The editor of the *Planet* folded his arms, a little after the fashion of Napoleon, although he had too

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balanced a mind ever to feel in the least Napoleonic. "I don't know why," he said after a moment's pause. "It may not be very logical and I daresay I shall live to regret it, but there is something there that tells me"—he pointed a finger ruefully whimsical at the pit of his own stomach—"that at all hazards we have to keep out of this."

"Not 'we,' my friend." The voice of Saul Hartz took him up sharply. "Confine yourself to the first person singular."

"When I say 'we', I mean the *Planet* newspaper, a thing over and beyond myself."

"Be it so. And for that reason you must stand to your guns. We can carry on, of course, without you. No man is indispensable. But you are by far the ablest person in this office with one exception . . . put that in your pipe and smoke it! . . . and you mustn't think of leaving the ship at such a crisis."

As the Colossus spoke he rose from his chair and with the gesture of an elder brother laid a hand on Gage's shoulder. The elemental simplicity of the man was hard to resist. Bennet Gage had always been susceptible to it. Never had Saul Hartz been more compelling than at this moment. But the issue at stake transcended the personal equation.

A great effort was called for but Gage mustered the tenacity to stand his ground. He idolized the *Planet* and in spite of headstrong, domineering ways he idolized its owner; but he was face to face now with a

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very grave decision. "I beg you—I beg you"—his voice shook—"to keep us out of this."

"Bah—you old woman!"

Scarcely had the words been uttered, when Saul Hartz was troubled to perceive the look of horror in the eyes of his lieutenant. "Forgive me, Gage!" It was almost the air of a schoolboy. "You're not thinking of yourself, I know that of course, but you must, you simply must, trust the man at the wheel, as you always have trusted him, eh?"

For both, the silence that followed was full of pain. And of a sudden it was ended by half audible words. "I offer my resignation not because I want to, not because I ought to, but because a power not myself . . ." Unable to complete a sentence that grew more lame as it went on, the editor of the *Planet* lurched awkwardly out of the room.

XV

RUFFLED in temper, chafed in spirit, the Colossus sought distraction in his morning's mail. For the most part his letters were not exciting. But the *bonne bouche* was still held in reserve. The registered envelope heavily sealed with black wax and ominously edged with a mourning border, which had first caught his attention, he was careful to keep back until all the others had been opened. Finally, as its turn came, he felt a queer little thrill of anticipation as he took it in his fingers.

The emotion it aroused was not wholly agreeable. Nay; it was so odd as to be a little unpleasant. What could such a portentous thing contain? Before breaking the seal he examined it closely. But externals told nothing beyond what was to be deduced from the outside of the envelope, which bore the postmark Charing Cross.

From the inside he took a single sheet of plain note paper. On it were typewritten the following words:

THE COUNCIL OF SEVEN

"TO THE WORLD'S MISCHIEF MAKER

"You are required to attend a special meeting of the Council of Seven. Time and place will be communicated to you in due course. Meanwhile you are advised to put your affairs in order."

There was no signature to this document. It revealed nothing beyond these trite sentences, so cryptic and so bald, which might mean so little or so much.

To Saul Hartz, however, this message implied a great deal. It was his boast, and no idle one, that he was the best informed man in Europe. The wonderful organization of which he was the mainspring, the controlling spirit, gave him facilities for knowing what was taking place behind the scenes, not in England nor in Europe only, but in every land of the habitable globe. Many portentous and significant things, the aftermath of the recent world upheaval, which were only hinted at in senates and chancellories or vaguely guessed at by private individuals and the public at large were matters of common form to Saul Hartz. No man alive had a deeper insight into hidden things. And for that reason the shock he now received would hardly have been felt by a person of average information or experience.

This message, strange as it was, came as a blow he had half foreseen. He was not unprepared, yet in spite of himself he felt a little stunned by it. The

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instinct of the dominant human male was to affect a high contempt, but the instinct of a mind acquainted with a thousand-and-one cross currents immediately below the troubled surface of human society was very different. As he stood at his writing table, holding the letter in his hand, a chill seemed to strike at his heart.

He was still in this attitude when Robert Norton, one of the principal leader writers of the *Planet*, came into the room. Norton, a brilliant Irishman of thirty, was the master of a diabolically incisive but absolutely unscrupulous pen. Without convictions of his own, without faith, religion or a sense of justice, at every fresh cast of the political horoscope he was ready at a moment's notice to make the worse appear the better part in entire subordination to the abnormal mind by whom he was rewarded with the salary of a prime minister.

"Ha, Norton, good-morning!" It was a wrench for the Colossus to break his reverie, but with an effort he managed to do so.

Norton, typical product of the large public school and the old university, bowed slightly. He was able to hide the urbane irony of his race, and that was all. With the air of a man at some pains to conceal the fact that his tongue is in his cheek he waited for the august Chief of the U. P. to speak again.

"Are you up in this Garland business?"

It was second nature with Saul Hartz to weigh his

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words. He took pains to adjust them to every fresh mind with whom he was brought in contact. In his daily intercourse with all sorts and conditions of people he prided himself upon the faculty of saying neither too little nor too much.

"One only knows," Norton answered, "that about twelve o'clock last night he fell down dead as he entered the Cosmopolitan."

"No more than that?" The careless tone, the veiled eyes took all significance out of the question.

Such was the limit of Norton's knowledge of the matter, except that Mr. Gage had given him to understand that he was required to write a leader on the subject whose scope the Chief himself would indicate.

Saul Hartz made no immediate comment on this rather dry answer. He seemed oddly silent and constrained. For the first time in Norton's knowledge of him there was a look of indecision in his face. Suddenly he said with a change of key so curious as to be a little startling to one who knew him so well: "I've changed my mind. We'll postpone this Garland leader." He hesitated an instant, and then his voice changed again. "Tell Mr. Gage I would like a further word with him." It was that tone of the high potentate which was apt secretly to amuse men like Norton who were constitutionally incapable of reverence.

The editor of the *Planet* obeyed the summons at once. He seemed a bundle of nerves as he came into the room. But his relief was keen when he was curtly

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informed that for the time being the Garland affair was to stand in abeyance.

"Your resignation, I take it, will not appear to-morrow in large pica on page eight," said the Colossus with a gleam of frost.

"Not unless you hold me to it." The look in the large, dark, oriental eyes had an almost canine pathos. Bennet Gage would not have been at all surprised had the despot done so.

"No, carry on, my friend." The words of the Colossus were light, but a grim mouth belied them. "I quite think we shall have to put all the cards on the table, but this may not be the moment. Before taking a definite line, it may be well to hear what the coroner's jury has to say on the subject. In the meantime, we had better get to know whether Scotland Yard's keeping anything up its sleeve."

"Verity can be trusted there, I think."

"I hope so." Saul Hartz, as he spoke, took the black sealed envelope from the table before him and slipped it into his coat pocket. A weaker man would have been impelled to take Gage into his confidence. But the self-faith of the Colossus stood foursquare against every shock. He was even ready to despise himself for allowing such a piece of "mumbo jumbo" to upset his plans. The fact remained that it had; but so far as he could he was determined to minimize the effect and to conceal the cause.

"You had better make this to-morrow's first article."

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As the Chief spoke, he opened a drawer in his writing table and took out a printer's galley proof, with a number of corrections in his own forcible hand. "Instead of 'The Chinese Situation,' I've headed it 'Plain Words to the Celestial Empire,' and you'll see I've gingered it up generally. And Fuller might follow on in the *Mercury* with 'A Straight Tip to John Chinaman.'"

The editor cast an acute eye over the Chief's flamboyance. "A shade on the strong side, aren't we?" But his tone had lightened considerably. To the mind of Bennet Gage the mysterious death of an American labor leader was a far more significant matter than a calculated affront to several hundred million people.

"The stronger the better," was the curt answer of the Colossus. "I have very good reasons."

Mr. Gage did not question that.

"They can be bullied to any amount, dear souls!" The Chief smiled sardonically. "And a little demonstration of our power is called for just now. Every newspaper's first duty is to impress the groundlings. But even that is not our real aim." With an abrupt laugh, which to Bennet Gage had a meaning far deeper than mere irony, he suddenly dismissed the subject.

What an enigma the man was! That thought obsessed the mind of the editor of the *Planet* as he went out of the room.

XVI

AFTER Mr. Gage had gone, Saul Hartz sat some time at his table in deep thought. Then he began to pace the room slowly and heavily, in a state of indecision quite alien to his character. Finally, by pressing the bell once, he summoned Helen Sholto from the next room, issued a few brief but clear directions in regard to the pile of letters on his table, taking care, however, as he did so, to assure himself that the most important one was in his coat pocket. And then putting on overcoat and hat he affirmed his intention of lunching at the Imperium Club and the probability of a return to the Office about four o'clock.

Mr. Hartz's slow walk from Fleet Street along the Strand across Trafalgar Square was without real incident until he reached Pall Mall. At various points along the route it was illuminated by flaming news bills, his own and his rivals', proclaiming "Mysterious Death of Famous Labor Leader." At the very dangerous corner, however, where the Carlton Hotel debauches from the Haymarket, and where more than one recognized ornament of human society has paid toll to Moloch in his modern guise, the Colossus came within an ace of being cut off.

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A mechanical contrivance propelled by a simian shape in oilskins and a peaked cap, one of Plato's two-legged animals without feathers, crashed round the fatal corner almost at the precise instant that Saul Hartz, fathoms deep in thought, incautiously left the pavement. How he managed to escape being run over was purely a matter for the ironical deities who had his affairs in hand. Escape he did, however. And so rudely had his powerful mind been summoned to the needs of the moment that he was able to observe that the engine of destruction was armed fore and aft with placards, bearing the single word

GARLAND

The contraption itself was painted a flaming yellow, the sign manual of the Universal Press, and surmounting it like a halo was its world-famous motto:

FIRST WITH THE NEWS AS USUAL

Perhaps the first emotion to arise in the outraged being of the Colossus was regret that he had not recovered quickly enough from his shock to take the number of this friend of progress. It would have been pleasant to deal with the creature in due season; but if such a feeling was ever there, it was superseded immediately by a sense of pride. As usual, the U. P. was living up to itself. The efficiency of the grim monster that had been created by his severely practical genius was ruthless, astonishing, without a flaw. Only

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a very little reflection was needed for the mind of Saul Hartz to set the incident in true perspective. The achievement of this obscure servant of the U. P. was not a matter for censure. To dash round the Haymarket corner at midday without warning, at the rate of twenty miles an hour, was praiseworthy in the highest degree. Feats such as that, on an ever-ascending plane, without a thought for the rights of others, had enabled the U. P. to declare, as usual, a dividend for the last financial year of one hundred per cent, free of tax.

Difficult as it was to know why at that moment the mangled form of the Colossus was not on its way in a wheeled ambulance to Charing Cross Hospital, he was not a man to yield to an isolated fact of experience. By the time he had passed through Jermyn Street and had made the perilous crossing to Swan & Edgar's corner, this minor incident was as if it had not been. The mind of Saul Hartz was now engulfed in a far more potent thing.

Near the entrance of the Piccadilly Hotel he stopped and took from an inner pocket a small address book bound in red leather. Memory reinforced, he went on as far as the Albany and halted finally at a door towards the Vigo Street end of that quaint caravansary.

The knock of the Colossus was answered at once by a creature slightly more odd than his surroundings. A pure bred Egyptian in a neat gray flannel suit, surmounted by a taboosh, opened the door and greeted

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the visitor with a gravely impassive smile. The man, slight of form, lustrous of feature, had an aloof dignity; he had, moreover the noetic subtlety of a very old civilization.

"Mr. Wygram in? Give him my card, will you?"

In the presence of such forceful, deliberate authority the smile of the janitor became a bow. Mr. Hartz produced a card. "Tell him, please, a very urgent matter."

The man bowed again. Saul Hartz took this further obeisance as an invitation to enter. With cat-footed elegance the Egyptian silently bore the card to his master.

XVII

SAUL HARTZ had not long to wait. Almost immediately the Egyptian reappeared. Without speaking a word he contrived to make clear that Mr. Wygram would receive his visitor.

The Colossus was ushered at once into the presence of a remarkable personage. A man about forty years old was seated cross-legged on the ground, after the fashion of the East, in a room hardly less exotic. Its cushions, rugs and curtains evoked the Orient as surely as the tchibouk its occupant was contemplatively sucking and the fumes of the pungent-scented Arabian tobacco which filled the whole place. The man who sat on a cushion on the richly carpeted floor wore a burnoose, slippers and a turban. In every detail of surroundings and pose he recalled a very different scene, but the dark-eyed, close-shaven face, in spite of a withdrawn look which lent it a subtle asceticism, was too fair of skin to suggest an exclusively eastern type.

The keenly penetrating Hartz who had never seen this man before, was a little taken aback by the sight he presented. Almost the first thought that entered

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the visitor's mind was that he had to do with an obvious charlatan. The trappings of the East superimposed upon the contours of the West did not inspire confidence. Yet the reputation of this man Wygram was such as to make it impossible to dismiss him lightly. Humbug he might be, yet no one could have earned such a name throughout the world, or rather the underworld of high affairs, without being the possessor of qualities which placed him entirely beyond the range of ordinary people.

All the same a dyed-in-the-wool skeptic found it hard to dissemble a secret pang which was more than disappointment if less than disgust, as he confronted this pseudo-oriental with a smile and a conventional phrase.

"It is good of you, Mr. Wygram, to see me."

The man on the floor removed the pipe from his lips and bowed slightly. Between his slender fingers, which were those of an æsthete and an artist, he held the card of his august visitor.

"Pray, sit down," he said, in a gentle voice of extraordinary sweetness as the Egyptian closed the door and left them together.

As Saul Hartz brought his solid bulk very slowly and deliberately to anchor on the edge of a most seductive divan, he felt pretty sure in his own mind that already he had this merry-andrew sized up.

The man on the floor placidly resumed his tchibouk. With a grave absorption, a more than oriental indiffer-

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ence, he continued to smoke. Evidently it was his way of asking his visitor to explain himself. But the Colossus could not help secretly resenting this detachment. He was a very great man. It was idle to disguise that fact. The world at large was even more keenly aware of it than he was himself; therefore, the pose of this creature Wygram was a little galling.

Saul Hartz was too much a man of the world to betray his private feelings. But with an air more rapt than that of any fakir, soothsayer or mystic, Wygram calmly awaited the declaration of his errand. But why declare it? A sudden doubt now stiffened the will of the Colossus. Such a window-dressing fellow was a European or most likely an American, the astutest kind of westerner who knew how to wear his tongue in his cheek. Why, therefore, disclose such an exceedingly intimate matter to one whom instinctively he did not trust; one who, moreover, might know how, should occasion call, to turn such very perilous knowledge against him.

It was not to be wondered at that the ensuing silence was not immediately broken. To Saul Hartz it was peculiarly trying. He was a man who had a right to plume himself upon the faculty of knowing his own mind. His fortunes had been built upon it. But now, at this difficult moment, for almost the first time in his life it deserted him. Should he confide in this charlatan or should he not?

In the end it was the man on the ground who opened

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the ball. He removed the tube from his lips and said with a curious absence of gesture, almost in the manner of one who communes with the unseen, "I appreciate your difficulty, Mr. Hartz. But in these little matters, things are not always as they appear."

This speech, delicately suave though it was, yet stung the visitor to words of his own. "What little matters?" he asked, with a sense of irritation that he knew to be illogical.

"When busy men seek me out," was the answer, "they desire guidance, as a rule, in things beyond their ken . . . things which have suddenly, unexpectedly, even terribly obtruded themselves upon their daily lives."

Curtly, Saul Hartz agreed. This cunning quack was fishing for a clue to the business which had brought him there.

"You are under no obligation to take me into your confidence." The voice was charming. "There was no compulsion for you to come here at all. And now you are here, you deplore your boldness. The dilemma is quite intelligible. One even sympathizes with it. But there is a short way out, if you will but consent to take it."

"Very glad, if you'll find one for me," said Hartz, in a voice that was half a growl.

"Nothing simpler. Smoke one of my cigarettes and I guarantee that your path shall grow magically clearer."

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Saul Hartz scowled a little. Even when the man on the floor made a long arm and took a box of wonderful Indian inlay work from a tiny table near his elbow and offered it with a smile of rare courtesy, the dubiousness of the visitor was without disguise.

"No pressure." Wygram held out the box with an air of delicious irony. "Quite a free agent, my dear sir."

Like a swimmer taking a plunge into the Serpentine on Christmas morning, Saul Hartz suddenly dipped his fingers among the cigarettes. Moreover, with the faint-smiling aid of his host he lit one defiantly, and what was of even more consequence proceeded to smoke it with an air of slight bravado.

It was a powerful, rare, full-flavored Arabian tobacco. Mumbo jumbo, of course! However, he would humor this trickster, who found it so easy to deceive the world into believing that he was a wielder of occult powers. Nevertheless, a dozen whiffs or so cleared the brain wonderfully. Doubts melted. The mind began to germinate. And the man on the ground in spite of his queer trappings and his feline ways acquired a power, an atmosphere, an authority that Saul Hartz had never before conceded to any human being.

"You suffer from limitations, Mr. Hartz." The fall of the soft syllables had a music beyond anything the Colossus had ever heard.

"We all do, don't we?" he answered, with a first gruff approach to geniality.

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"Yes, but some in a greater, some in a less, degree."

"True."

"Even to the verge of platitude! But the trouble with you clean-run westerners, if you'll excuse my saying so, is that your minds can only react to one small fragment of the Truth; and again, if you'll excuse my saying so, it is not the fragment that really matters."

At any other moment, the creator of the *Planet* newspaper, whose circulation over five continents was reckoned in millions of copies a day, would have challenged this statement. A brain such as his susceptible only to things that didn't matter! Yes, the usual "gup" of the inflated high-brow ass. But he was good to listen to, this pseudo-oriental, for the simple reason that he was clever enough to keep a special blend of tobacco to soothe, tickle, stimulate the brains of his patrons.

"You 'practical' men, who harness Niagara and dream of making the material universe your servant, who aspire to shoot yourselves out of a gun to the planet Jupiter and back again, have got hold of the wrong end of the stick, if you'll excuse my saying so. However, that's neither here nor there. You are a busy man with only a limited portion of what you are pleased to call 'time' at your disposal."

"True enough," Mr. Hartz was now able to muster his own private blend of raillery. "And you would have one believe that what lesser mortals call time and

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space are completely transcended by such a mind as your own."

"In a manner of speaking, yes. If one is able to glimpse the Whole its counterfeits don't matter much. But as I am sure you are not particularly concerned with the Realities, perhaps you'll tell me what I can do for you."

Mr. Hartz had now smoked the enchanted cigarette; his ideas were clearer, his thoughts less turgid, but he was not yet convinced that any good end would be served by admitting the mysterious Wygram to his confidence. Still, he hoped for enlightenment, perhaps for a little advice. Many whom the world accounted wise had bestowed upon this man undeniable credentials.

The visitor's perplexity seemed rather to amuse Wygram. "As a proof of my *bona fides*," he said, after a pause that held a threat of embarrassment, "allow me to indicate your business. It has to do, unless I am greatly mistaken, with the murder of Garland."

Skeptical as he was, Hartz could not repress a start of surprise. "How did you find out that?"

"A simple matter. I claim no supernatural power: at least as far as you are concerned, and as up till now your affairs have been presented to me. But there is a science of deduction, even if of late years it has been sadly blown upon by writers of fiction. In other words, two and two still make four—at all events in a three-dimensional universe."

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Saul Hartz was a little impressed. "You claim access to the fourth dimension?" he asked, rather naïvely.

"It will be more immediately profitable, I think, if, for the moment, we keep strictly within the scope of this inquiry. You are troubled by the murder of Garland. I use the word 'murder' advisedly. You would like to ask why? But let us pass on to its bearing upon your own affairs. Why, Mr. Hartz, are you troubled by this man Garland's end? I hope you'll agree that it was richly deserved."

"An arch-blackguard, certainly."

"And therefore his fate was merited?"

"Ye-es. Perhaps. But I don't hold with murder."

As Saul Hartz spoke, a pair of vivid eyes completely absorbed him. "*You* don't hold with murder?" The sensitive lips had a slight curl of scorn.

"No, sir, I do not." The emphasis of the Colossus amounted almost to indignation. "But why take it for granted that Garland was murdered?"

"Beyond a doubt he was murdered."

Proofs were asked for.

"He was warned by the Council of Seven," said Wygram.

Hartz gazed intently at the man on the ground. "So you know about the Council of Seven?" In spite of himself he could not keep an odd tremor out of his voice.

"Oh, yes," said Wygram. "Perhaps I know as much

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about the Society of the Friends of Peace as any man alive."

An imperious curiosity suddenly devoured Saul Hartz. "A member of it, eh?" A feeling of intense repugnance governed the framing of the question.

Wygram said calmly that he was not a member of the Society.

"But if you were"—Mr. Hartz disdained finesse where his feelings were deeply engaged—"you would have to deny it, I presume?"

"Expedient, no doubt," said Wygram dryly. "But I assure you the need doesn't arise."

The heavy face of the visitor lost a little of its gloom. There was even a light of eagerness in the somber eyes as he said: "May I ask one question? When Garland arrived here from New York a week ago, did he consult you professionally in the matter of his warning?"

"He did." The answer seemed a little reluctant.

"Sought your help and advice?"

"Ye-es."

"Sought the help you couldn't give?" The words were almost a sneer. "But no doubt you were able to offer advice that he was not in a position to follow."

Wygram laughed softly. "That is so, Mr. Hartz. But if you hold these *a priori* ideas in regard to my abilities why do you come to me yourself?"

"It doesn't follow that I've come to consult you. Howbeit, there is no harm in saying that I have. But

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one hardly goes so far as to look for material assistance from you."

"In your dealings with the Society?"

The uncompromising question rather took Saul Hartz aback. "I didn't say so," he fenced. "We were discussing Garland. You say that Garland came to you for advice. May I ask what advice you gave him?"

The answer did not come at once. Wygram drew solemnly at his tchibouk. After a silence of several moments he said with a cool picking of words, "Since Garland didn't choose to follow the advice I gave, it may not be very profitable to disclose it—particularly as I was out of sympathy with the man himself."

"You offered advice all the same."

"I did. Out of no regard for Garland, with no desire to save his life, but merely in the interests of the community as a whole."

"Allow me to put this question." Hartz's senses were now strung to the point of intensity. "Had Garland followed the course you suggested to him, do you suppose he would have been alive to-day?"

"I think it highly probable."

"Yet in your view he was a bad man?"

"Had he taken the advice I gave him, he would have been impotent to do further mischief. But who does take advice?"

"Then why give it?"

"He came to me and sought it. I was enormously interested in his case. He was one of the most re-

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markable men I ever met. A creature of rare courage, energy, force of will, he aspired to the kind of dictatorship over his fellow men which seems to have such a fascination for half educated minds."

"You would rate such a man as Garland among the half educated?"

"Among the rather less than half educated. At best his power lay among the turbulent, seething proletariats of the western world which enjoy political power without having to pay for it, among the shiftless herds which are out to grab the goods and chattels of their more fortunate or more deserving neighbors."

"In other words, his aim was to set class against class, so that he might ride to power on the storm he had raised."

"*Vide the Planet newspaper.*" A soft laugh floated up from the ground.

"Just so!" The owner of the *Planet* newspaper folded his arms with a fine gesture. "We take credit to ourselves for revealing Garlandism in its true colors."

"And for drawing a dividend from your soap-and-water-using public, while your string of tag, rag and bobtail prints coax dividends from the millions who have no use for soap and water but can always afford a penny, a couple of cents, a few lira or half a mark as the case may be to have their cupidity pleasantly tickled."

The Colossus had heard the taunt so often that he had learned to smile at it. "You do the Universal

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Press less than justice," he said, with a touch of proprietorial complacency.

"No doubt!" The answering smile was a little dour. "But that is between you—and, shall we say?—the Council of Seven."

In spite of an iron will, Saul Hartz started at the rather sinister deliberation of the words. "For the present, if you don't mind, let us keep to Garland." The attempt at rebuke was not altogether successful.

"Wiser, no doubt." Wygram, politely nonchalant, pointed to the silver box. The visitor warily took a second cigarette. "Garland was the only one of his kind." Wygram's voice grew curiously soft. "And his case, looking at it 'in the round,' opened a door in my experience."

"That I can readily believe." Saul Hartz had no afterthought. "From the details the Office has been able to glean, the full story of Garland's death might be the biggest 'scoop' of modern times."

XVIII

FOR a little, while the two men smoked, there was silence. They did not quite set each other's genius, it was clear. Between them was a subtle antagonism, which yet on both sides did not deny a claim to respect. Saul Hartz, at any rate, had now modified considerably his first estimate of "the pseudo-oriental."

"There's a second question I hope you'll not mind my asking," he said at last. "Do you know exactly what agent was used to compass Garland's death?"

"Oh, yes." Wygram's tone removed every shred of doubt from the mind of his questioner.

"Your information would be of considerable value to—shall we say—the police?"

"The police are in possession of it," said Wygram unconcernedly.

"May I ask how you know that?"

"I have been acting for them."

Hartz was at once alive to the significance of the statement. "Are you at liberty to disclose the full extent of your knowledge?"

"At liberty, yes," was the cool reply. "I never, in

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any circumstances, touch a case without retaining complete liberty of action. But in this affair, I am not inclined to communicate what I know to a private person."

"Why not?"

"It would be against the public interest."

"So say the police. By the way, when were you called in?"

"This morning—at two o'clock."

"It hasn't taken long to get at the facts."

"A mass of data was available from those other cases."

"Yamotoga and Kornichef?"

Wygram's calm avowal of full knowledge of those dark affairs which so deeply stirred a section of the world had a palpable effect upon Hartz. But he went on with his catechism.

"Were you allowed to examine the body?"

"I was."

"Were you able to tell the police the exact cause of death?"

"Oh, yes."

It went against the grain for Saul Hartz to believe that Wygram spoke the truth, but tone and manner overrode all doubt. He was piqued by the discovery. For once, that proud creation of his own, the U. P. secret service, was at fault. It was far from pleasing to the Colossus that persons there were in the realm so much better informed than himself.

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One fact clearly emerged. Report, for once, had not over-painted the attainments of this man Wygram. How to make use of them was the problem for his visitor. The man was determined to lock away his knowledge. It was plain that he set more store by the police than by the U. P. But the Colossus had made up his mind already that so valuable an ally must be lured on to his own side.

With that end in view, Mr. Hartz produced at this point the Society's letter with its sinister black seal and mourning border.

He handed it to the man on the ground.

Wygram read the letter. Then he held it up to the light, also its envelope. His next act was to pass his fingers delicately over the surface of both.

"May I tear a little off?"

Permission was readily given for him to do so.

"Chinese," was Wygram's comment as he rubbed a small piece between his thumb and first finger. "It doesn't mean very much." Wygram negligently tossed two or three tiny fragments on to the carpet. "However, it serves to confirm a theory which is not going to mean very much either, but is certainly a sidelight on a most unpleasant affair."

"I hope you'll be as explicit as you can." Saul Hartz was now betraying a little anxiety. "It may be that I have something at stake."

"You have a good deal at stake." Wygram was not one to temper the wind to the shorn lamb.

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"Do you think you can help me?"

Wygram shook his head. "No," he said. "This is a matter in which one person only can help you. That person is yourself."

Such an answer was eminently unpleasant to Saul Hartz. His voice grew harsh and domineering. "I don't intend to let myself be intimidated by any sort of mumbo jumbo—if that is what you mean."

"William Garland used almost those identical words in this room less than a week ago."

The Colossus, in spite of the fact that Wygram's piercing black eyes were fixed upon his face, could not repress a shiver. "Won't you tell me," he said in a lower tone, "exactly what you are able to deduce from this letter and this envelope?"

Wygram pondered. "At this stage," he said slowly, "it would be premature, it would serve no purpose, and perhaps it might be unkind."

"Trying to give me cold feet, eh?" The voice of the Colossus again grew harsh.

"That is what I want to avoid. At the same time, if you value your life, don't make Garland's mistake."

"What was Garland's mistake?"

"He defied the Council of Seven."

Saul Hartz lifted an imperious chin. "What exactly do you mean by that?"

"The Society prescribed for Garland a certain course within a certain time. His only chance of life was to follow it, but that was a fact he chose to ignore."

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"No course has yet been prescribed for me, at any rate."

"It will be."

The Colossus folded his arms with a gesture of defiance. "That remains to be seen," he said.

"You are bound to hear more of this matter." Wygram toyed with the paper that was still in his hand. "The Society of the Friends of Peace has made up its mind to break you."

"If it can."

Wygram's eyes were fixed once again upon a face which was betraying signs of an ever-deepening conflict. "That hardly admits of doubt," he said in a low, solemn voice.

"Nonsense . . . nonsense!" The manner of the Colossus was that of one struggling to throw off an evil dream. "I refuse to be intimidated by this sort of deviltry. I and my papers, I and my world-wide organization, will fight this *Vehmgericht*. We will scotch and kill it with the resources we command."

"I hope you may." Wygram weighed his words coolly. "Of two evils it is well to choose the less. And that is saying much. For the U. P. is a foul blot enough on our civilization, heaven knows. And you yourself, sir, as I see you, are a sort of third-rate antichrist . . ."

"Thank you!"

"A Napoleon *in p  tto*, but a dire menace, all the same, to the peace of the world. Still, your wings are

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about to be clipped and that is reason enough for honest men to rejoice."

Saul Hartz resented these words deeply, but his arrogance was too great to allow the fact to appear in his manner. His laugh had even a ring of good humor. Wygram, fully bent on taking the measure of the man, did not let that laugh escape him. He rather liked the fellow for being able to indulge it at such a moment. After all, this brummagem Colossus might be of larger mold than on the surface he seemed.

One thing was clear. They were well met, these two. Each sought to assay the other, and if possible, transmute any residuum of exact knowledge into power.

"You are out of sympathy with my aims and ambitions." The mildness of Saul Hartz had quite an apologetic sound. "But don't for that reason blind yourself willfully to the fact that the remedy we are up against is far worse than the disease."

"I wonder!"

"You needn't!" said the Colossus, sternly. "This *Vehmgericht* is trying to put back the clock five hundred years."

"The U. P.," said Wygram, "aims at even more than that. It would reduce the whole world to slavery."

"A mere figure of speech, my friend!"

"We shall not agree. The U. P. is now an international ring of newspaper bosses which has corralled everything that relates to the printed word. Cables,

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labor, paper, ink, power of distribution—it has cornered them all. The time is at hand when the humblest sheet of provincial gossip will be subject to your veto here, and the veto of Breit in America.”

“Impossible!”

“Nothing is impossible to the big serpent who swallows all the little serpents. His capacity grows and grows. The late war has definitely put back the clock of mankind. Such phenomena as yourself, say the wise, are proof enough that the human race is now past its zenith.”

The Colossus smiled. He was careful, all the same, to veil any contempt he might feel for such reasoning. It was his intention to use this man Wygram, inimical as he was, so far as lay in his power.

“Just now,” said Saul Hartz, “in examining that absurd letter in your hand, you let fall the word ‘Chinese.’ May I ask if you attach any particular significance to the presence in London of Lien Weng, the philosopher and mystic?”

For a moment Wygram considered the question. Moreover, he weighed carefully the range of information of the man who asked it. Finally he decided to answer. “Yes, quite a good deal,” he said frankly.

“Do the police share that view?”

“I believe so.”

“Then why don’t they move in the matter?”

“For one of two reasons,” said the candid Wygram. “Either they can’t, or they daren’t.”

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"Daren't!"

"Very deep minds are in this affair. The human race, as you probably know, is faced with some ugly developments."

"Of which I am said to be the only true begetter!"

"There are others, less commonplace, in the higher regions of thought."

"What are they?"

"I am not at liberty to disclose them. But I may say this: your case, Mr. Hartz, has interested me much, and its inevitable developments are going to interest me even more. Therefore, at a later stage, if you care to come and see me again, pray do so."

The Colossus rose from his cushioned divan with rather a disgruntled look.

"I'm afraid I've not been particularly illuminating," said Wygram with a faint smile. "But I may be able to reconcile it with a sense of duty to shed a little light on your darkness presently."

"What has a sense of duty to do with the matter?" The Colossus was hardly able to repress a snarl of impatience.

"Of two evils I choose the less. Still, as I say, it may be possible later to modify my views a little. I hope you'll come and see me again."

With a courtesy more than oriental yet not wholly free of a natural irony due to the circumstances, Wygram rose slowly from the ground and took leave of his perplexed visitor.

XIX

JOHN ENDOR had arranged that after his meeting at Hellington he should go on to Wyndham, his mother's house, some twenty miles away in the neighboring county of Middleshire, and there spend the week-end. Helen had promised to join him on the Saturday. She had yet to make the acquaintance of Lady Elizabeth, but now that the Rubicon was as good as crossed, she was called upon to face the rather dreaded music of the maternal criticism.

As things turned out, this week-end plan chimed very well with the course of events. Thursday was the day of the Hellington meeting; it was also the day of Helen's powerfully disturbing talk with Saul Hartz. And at the breakfast table on Friday morning, when she opened her *Planet* prior to setting out for the Office, she received a further shock. Two heavy captions on the paper's front page at once caught her eye:

RIOT AT HELLINGTON

M. P.'S MEETING BROKEN UP

It was no more than she expected. John had been

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refused a hearing. Missiles had been thrown, and, finally, a hostile mob had stormed the platform. Moreover, in the course of the fierce *mêlée* which had followed, the would-be speaker had sustained an injury to his head.

On the way to the Office, Helen's first act was to telegraph to Wyndham for fuller particulars. The three hours which had to elapse before a reply came were spent in great bitterness of spirit. John might or might not be sorely hurt, but this harsh sequel to the wrong he had already suffered was going to make it very difficult to forgive the authors of the mischief.

Precisely who those authors were, Helen, as yet, was in a position only to surmise. The whole thing was a cruel blunder on the part of the U. P. And yet, as far as Helen was concerned, the real tragedy lay in Saul Hartz's defense of it.

As soon as she reached the Office, she at once pointed out to the Chief what had happened. He professed a sincere regret and promised that Mr. Endor's denial of his misreported Blackhampton speech, which had provoked the trouble, should be immediately circulated.

"But one understood," said Helen, "that the contradiction was to appear this morning."

"You are quite right," said the Chief, with a fine appearance of candor. "Presently I will go into the whole matter with Mr. Gage and Mr. Fuller and Mr. Bryant. They are entitled to stand their ground. One feels for them—in fact, one quite sympathizes with

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their attitude—but they must not ignore instructions. Mr. Endor's contradiction, as I have already promised you, shall be given full publicity."

"Too late, I'm afraid, to be of the slightest use now," said Helen, bitterly.

"We'll hope not," said the Chief, with an oleaginous purr. "It's never too late to repair an indiscretion."

But Helen's temper showed a rising insurgency. "To my mind," she said, "the whole thing is indefensible. It's a blunder or worse, on the part of somebody."

Mr. Hartz did his best with soft words, but Helen was deeply angry. Clearly he was afraid of losing her and, rather than do so, he was ready to grovel. Several times, indeed, in the course of this painful interview, she was on the point of taking a definite, irrevocable step, but the consummate tact of the man with whom she was dealing was just able to stave off a final decision. And yet, in Helen's own mind, it was not this diplomacy which really turned the scale; it was, when all was said, a sense of deep loyalty to one from whom she had received much kindness that became the determining factor.

"I understand you've telegraphed for further news. As soon as you hear, please let me know how he is, unfortunate fellow!"

With that almost angelic valediction in her ears, Helen retired. But anger, impatience, bitterness were running riot. Her spirit was more than ever at war.

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Why had she not the resolution to break with this man? As soon as she had forsaken the presence of this spell-binder for the privacy of her own room, the stern question had to be met. A breach was almost inevitable now.

In a state of miserable indecision she returned to her work. But all the morning her thoughts were elsewhere. She could think of little save the answer to her telegram. Just before one o'clock, however, came the welcome news that John's injury was not serious and that he was looking forward to seeing her on the morrow at Wyndham.

XX

HELEN'S brief visit to the country proved to be a rather severe ordeal. It began with a lonely five-mile drive from the station in an antiquated brougham. And, on arrival at Wyndham about six o'clock on Saturday evening, a general state of tension was not made less when she found that John in obedience to doctor's orders was keeping his bed, and that his mother had mounted guard over him.

Lady Elizabeth was a dragon "of the old school"; at least, that was the effect she contrived to make upon Helen in the course of their first evening together. A masterful dame of seventy, wonderfully active in spite of growing infirmity, it was clear to the guest, by the time she had spent ten minutes with her fiancé's mother, that she would have a head full of feudal ideas to contend with. For the mistress of Wyndham, beyond a doubt, was a survival of another age. And to the modern mind of an American it was an age of considerably less enlightenment.

John, for one thing, was her ewe lamb. And she

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had no thought of surrendering him lightly. Far from approving his politics or his revolutionary coquettings with "new ideas," of all things the most deadly in his mother's opinion, she seemed to regard him still as only fit for the nursery. He knew little about life, he knew even less about women.

In their first quarter of an hour together over the drawing-room teacups Helen was amused, irritated, surprised, confounded by the calm assumptions of Lady Elizabeth Endor. All her standards of life and conduct were based on a rather remote past. John, who had humor enough to make due allowance for the old lady's antique flavor, had done his best to prepare Helen for a shock; all the same, a lively sense of the comic was needed in Helen herself to make tolerable that first evening at Wyndham.

Not the least trying circumstance was Lady Elizabeth's complete and resolute charge of the patient. If he were able to get a good night's rest and his cut and bruised head became no worse, he might be allowed "up" for a short time on the morrow. Meanwhile, no one, not even his affianced, must venture to disturb the peace of his chamber.

Helen liked not the ukase but she had to submit. She had also to submit to dressing for dinner in a fireless but moldily magnificent bedroom. Moldy magnificence seemed, in fact, to be the note of that cheerless house. It even extended to the dinner itself. Long before that function was through, Helen felt that it was

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the most depressing and unsatisfying meal she had ever eaten.

Behind the old lady's chair was a solemn pontiff in the form of a butler: a lord in waiting to a lady in waiting to Good Queen Victoria. A lovely bit of mahogany was before them; wonderful old silver, fine napery and divers articles of "bigotry and virtue" that excited Helen's cupidity, lay all around; and yet the whole scheme had such an air of historical solidity that it might have come from Madame Tussaud's, the Wallace Collection, or the Ark.

The fare was so scant that Helen would have had qualms about taking a full share had not her hostess appeared to subsist on hot water and dry toast. Moreover, it was ill cooked, sauceless, uninspired; and although claret was offered with an air that conferred the monarchy of all vintages upon it, the guest regretted that she had not been content with a humble but safe alternative in the form of barley water.

So much for the meal. As for the spirit which informed it, Helen soon found that it was hopeless for a mere "American newspaper person" of no particular social credentials, to penetrate the *chevaux de frise* of Lady Elizabeth's class consciousness. To begin with, judging by a stray remark the old woman let fall, it seemed a source of mild surprise to find that "an American" was not necessarily "a nigger" and that "a newspaper person" was not necessarily "a printer." All the same, when the best had been said and every

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allowance made for the march of progress for any woman to be actively engaged in earning her own living was to place her in the governess category if not actually to consign her to the lower depths with Mossop the butler, and his highly trained subordinates, Charles and John.

Had Helen been less troubled in spirit, a keen sense of humor would have been frankly charmed by this almost perfect specimen from the backwoods. John himself always alluded to his mother as "a genuine Die-hard." It was her austere, yet not altogether unenlightened feudalism, he declared, that had made England the country it was. Cherishing her as he did, and the wonderful old island of which she was the flesh and the bone, he certainly claimed for her many fine qualities. She was honest, she was wise in her own generation, she was fearless, she had a downright way of expressing herself, and according to her lights, she was just. All the same, her limitations were many and they were abrupt.

Charm, beauty, information, wit, Helen had her share of these and she used them modestly, but so far as John's mother was concerned, they made no impact. From his early days at Eton she had mapped out a matrimonial career for her only surviving son. Money he would need and money he should have, even if he must go outside his own class to look for it. No doubt some well-born heiress would come along—Lady Elizabeth might despair of the country but she was an in-

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vincible optimist in all matters relating to herself and family—she had heard, in fact, of a nice young heiress in the next county, and John, although his “radicalism” annoyed her deeply, being his mother’s son had merely to cast the handkerchief.

Poor Helen was to learn in the course of the evening that it would not be with the consent of her hostess if she ever became Mrs. John Endor. The wind was not tempered to the shorn lamb. John simply couldn’t afford to marry under ten thousand a year; he had a little, only a very little, of his own, and Wyndham was one of those ramshackle old places, although good of its kind, that was really so expensive to keep up.

John’s destiny, so to speak, was cut and dried—let there be no doubt on that score—although his politics, his general outlook, his “isms” were crosses for his mother’s old age. Indeed, the attitude of Lady Elizabeth to her distinguished son was that of an entirely responsible barndoor hen who, by a whim of the gods, has hatched a peacock. The ideas in which he trafficked were so much colored moonshine, for which she had simply no use at all. She was greatly surprised that Eton and Oxford had failed to knock such pernicious nonsense out of him. *Ne sutor ultra crepidam* was the motto she believed in. Old as she was, and rather too infirm to wield a stick with the vigor of her prime—the irony of the matter was, that a Spartan parent had always bestowed great pains upon his youth!

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—she did not despair, even now, of seeing this renegade back in the fold.

At any rate, the renegade's mother was fain to inform the edified Helen that the knock on the head he had received the previous day from the Hellington miners would do him all the good in the world. "A gentleman has no right to go among the rabble. They have no more use for him, than he should have for them. I hope they've hit him hard enough, that's all."

Even Helen, a woman of the world, hardly knew whether to be shocked or amused by this downright-ness. She compromised by being both. And greatly daring, she ventured presently to take up cudgels for her stricken hero.

Was it possible Lady Elizabeth didn't realize that one day John might become Prime Minister?

The Die-hard would be surprised at nothing, but in times like these it was little enough to any one's credit to become Prime Minister.

Helen, a little staggered, yet secretly charmed, did her best to develop the subject, but the old lady would have none of it. Abhorring John's ideas, she refused to take their owner seriously. The truth was she had never quite got over the shock of his flaunting a red necktie at Christ Church and being called in consequence "Comrade" Endor.

At the back of Lady Elizabeth's mind, no doubt, lay the hard fact that this Miss Sholto was not the least fantastic of "Comrade" Endor's "isms." She had no

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right to be there, and Helen was quick to penetrate to that cold truth. On occasion, however, she could be mischievous, and by the end of a trying meal she had decided that the only fun that evening was likely to provide would consist in drawing the old lady out.

She fell back, therefore, on tracing relationships. In Helen's opinion, it was a poor game at best, but it served at least to keep the ball of conversation rolling in the drawing room. Lady Elizabeth's tree was immensely distinguished; she was the second daughter of no less a personage than the fourth Duke of Bridport.

"My father," said Lady Elizabeth, "had the name of a very clever man. But his own class never forgave him for introducing what was called The People's Charter in the House of Lords. He certainly thought too much of the workingman, gave him free education, cheap beer, and so on. My father's weakness for the masses made him innumerable enemies. People called him Brother Bridport or the Mad Duke. When he left the Tories and went over to Gladstone, even his lifelong friends turned against him, the dear Queen among them."

"So that was why he was called the Mad Duke!" said Helen. The deadly phrase used by Saul Hartz recurred to her vividly: *madness in the mother's family*. Was it possible that the charge was based merely on the reputation of the fourth duke of Bridport? Helen

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felt a weight lifted suddenly from her mind. And yet, if this theory was sound, it was one rag the more torn from the reputation of a man whom she had implicitly trusted.

"I sometimes think," Lady Elizabeth went on, "that my unfortunate boy gets his eccentricity from his grandfather. All the rest of the family were so sensible. I can hear my Uncle Edmund saying to my father, 'Robert, the world is a good enough place as it is, if only fools like you will let it be.' A shrewd man Uncle Edmund. 'You'll put the workingman on top, and then you'll be happy,' he used to say. If Uncle Edmund could have had his way he would have hanged poor papa at Hyde Park Corner. And that is how I feel about that wretched boy upstairs."

Helen was hard set to keep her gravity. But she was just equal to the task. Moreover, with those sinister words of Saul Hartz still in her ears, there was yet a private end to gain. "Your mother's people"—of malice prepense she paused; it was so important to frame an innocent-seeming question in just the right way—"were much too wise, I suppose, to give away their own?"

"Dear me, yes," was the emphatic answer. "Canny Scotch folk who knew better than to give away anything."

"Due in part, no doubt," said Helen, "to living in a poor country where there may not be much to give."

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But I am perhaps a bit sensitive on the subject, because you see I happen to have Scotch blood myself."

The trap was laid with skill and masked with cunning. At any rate Lady Elizabeth walked right in. "My mother's mother was a Sholto of Bannocksyde." The proud old woman had an entirely misleading air of stating a fact of really very little importance.

Helen, too, could be adept with the pride that knows how to ape humility. She was content to offer a little mild surprise, and that was all. Everything, so far, was according to plan. She was quite aware that John's great grandmother was a Sholto of Bannocksyde, but Lady Elizabeth was not aware that the Sholtos of Virginia were a cadet branch of the same ancient line. With becoming modesty, Helen now revealed this interesting fact.

Lady Elizabeth proceeded at once to "sit up and take notice." It was as if her guest had suddenly "come alive." Helen could not resist a smile. A strange land, this England! her impious thought.

"Tell me, my dear," A new note had entered the raven voice of the old Die-hard. "Tell me, did your people go over with Columbus?"

"I forget the year Columbus sailed," said Helen demurely. "We went over, I believe, in 1680."

"Burke will tell us," said Lady Elizabeth with simple faith.

On that point, Burke was hardly so clear as John's mother expected. Helen was able to convince her, all

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the same, that in the year 1680 her fathers had settled in Virginia, and that her own parents were still living on the banks of Rose River in a house which had been built by the original pioneer, Douglas Graeme Sholto.

XXI

THE next day, which was Sunday, began with a surprise for Helen. When she came downstairs, exactly two minutes after the clock chimed half past eight, she found the servants to the number of sixteen kneeling in the hall and Lady Elizabeth reading prayers in a rigid evangelical manner. Suddenly, the heart of Helen took a leap across the Atlantic. The wanderer was back in her own home; she saw and heard her own mother, who alone of created beings she suspected of practicing this ritual. The flat voice, with its curious, low monotone, the stiffness of the central figure and those around it, even the soft play of light from the diamond panes upon the wonderful Tudor paneling, brought back her childhood with a rush. As Helen knelt in the midst of these people she was once again among her own.

John had had a fairly good night. His temperature was back to normal, and his Spartan parent had given a tardy consent that, provided Dr. Evans, who was expected in the course of the morning, confirmed it,

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the patient should come down to luncheon and eat roast beef. "Of course, my dear, he ought to stay in bed until to-morrow, but Dr. Evans is a weak man so he's sure to get round him. However, we mustn't let that keep us from church."

For church they set out accordingly twenty minutes before the doctor was due; and Lady Elizabeth, helped by stout boots, a short skirt, and an ebony cane, walked an honest three quarters of a mile across the beautiful park with a practical strength of spirit that Helen could but admire. Again it might have been her own mother in her own home, except that Lady Elizabeth was older than her mother by twenty years.

Sustained by the hope of John at luncheon, Helen did not find the service, although in itself decidedly uninspired, so hard to bear as otherwise it might have been. She hoped she was not guilty of the sin known to the Greeks as *hubris*, but she could not kill a feeling that John and she lived in another time, another mental atmosphere, another world. This handful of bovine rustics, stiff and uncomfortable in their Sunday clothes, listening vacantly to a string of *clichés* which they didn't comprehend and for which they would have been none the better had they been able to do so, how pathetic they were! And the "pi-jaw" delivered falsetto in the high voice known to Victorian days as an appanage of "the Oxford manner," how incongruous, how outworn it was!

The church itself, however, was another affair. It

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was an exquisite piece of early Gothic, nearly perfect of its kind, an authentic bit of the Middle Ages. While the old lady sat rigidly upright in her high-backed pew facing the chancel, her eyes fixed upon the clergyman, her ears struggling to catch and hold every one of the rapid, slovenly, half meaningless words that fell from his lips, the living alert mind by her side could not help reflecting that human nature did not change through the centuries. The Lady Elizabeth and her feudal retainers of six hundred years ago must have been like these! The same shibboleths, the same arcanas, the same crude paraphernalia to enable one to make the best of this life and the next!

On Helen's return to the house, full of a sense of duty stoutly performed, she was rewarded by the sight of John. He was sitting in the bow of the drawing-room window to catch the fugitive warmth of an October sun. A bandage was round his head and she was a little shocked to see how pale, how shattered, he looked. But as soon as he saw her he got up at once and took a quick step towards her, both hands held out like an eager, impulsive child.

If she had ever doubted her feeling for him, or had not weighed it adequately, their coming together now, in these tragic circumstances, seemed to define it anew. He was looking weak and ill, but apart from that he was much changed in three short days. Since the evening of Thursday, just before he received the enemy's first blow, he looked older by twenty years. Some-

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thing had passed out of his nature, something had crept in.

He was possessed now by a sense of frustration, anger, defeat. Fully, even whimsically, he was conscious of the unhappy bedfellows who had entered his brain. "It is wonderful," he said, "how a knock on the head may change a man. The short way to madness, I dare say." He spoke with a bitterness that did not belong to his nature.

Such words did not soften Helen's distress. They did not arise from physical suffering; there was neither fever nor pain; he was still a little weak, but otherwise not ill. The cause was within, somewhere deep down, at the root of being. Looking at his drawn face and tragic eyes, listening to his slow, enfeebled voice, the words of Saul Hartz came back to her. "He's down and out already."

Could it be so? Had his will been broken by this blow? Were those high, ennobling hopes which made him the man he was now permanently destroyed? She would not believe it. And yet, as she talked with him, a haunting fear flooded her mind. He was like one who bleeds internally. There was nothing that showed and yet there was dire reason to suspect a lesion of the soul.

In the afternoon, after a playful passage at arms with his mother who was determined to exalt him into "a case," he took Helen as far as the gazebo at the end of the terrace. Here for a full hour they sat with a

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generous sun upon them. Spread before their eyes was a lovely panoramic sweep of country. Out beyond the distant ring of fir-clad hills were the immensities.

As they sat side by side looking in silence and awe upon this wonder of wonders, a measure of healing came to them. The tragedy of their own frail humanity filled their hearts and drew them closer together. They saw themselves and one another as they were, two hapless specks of life. And yet with what tenacity they clung to it. Poised crazily in the middle of a narrow plank, rotten with age, over a bottomless abyss, one false step, and they were as though they had never been. That image of mortality filled their minds. To both alike, in those unforgettable moments, came knowledge of the stoicism that was needed in men and women who sought to overcome destiny.

Neither John or Helen had the depth of mind of the real thinker. In action lay their strength. To improve one tiny niche of the world they knew but very little was all they sought. But they were open to impressions, intensely alive. And each had a secret ear to catch, no matter how fitfully, how faintly, the pulse of the time.

"When we humans," said the sick man, "we hapless two-legs sit in our gazebo trying to peer behind the sunset, as you and I are doing now, we always seem to be up against one question. Is there anything really to be hoped from science? It is contriving all sorts

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of wonders, they say. The elixir of youth has been found. There shall be length of days for those who desire it. A remarkable vista is opened up by these recent discoveries. Here is a most fascinating book, a translation from the Chinese, which is causing a great stir."

Helen was shown the small volume in his hand.

"Lien Weng, I see," was her comment. "They were talking about him the other evening at the Bryants. He has revolutionized psychology, they say, whatever that may mean. One hasn't the mental machinery really to get at this sort of thing."

"It's beyond me, too," said John. "One can't quite reach to what he's driving at, although the translation seems pretty exact."

Helen read aloud the title of the book: *New Uses for the Will*.

"Or how to interpose your own upon the lives of others—that's what it seems to boil down to, as far as one can make out."

Helen could not withhold a slight shudder. "The idea sounds distinctly unpleasant to me. Instinctively one shuns it."

"It may have its ugly side," John agreed. "But it's reassuring to know that for the practice of this new and ticklish science, certain conditions have to be present in the mind of the subject to start with."

"Sounds like the old-fashioned hypnotism."

"Lien Weng claims more for it than that, much more.

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One's actions can be controlled from a distance, without physical contact of any kind, simply by the massed power of thought."

"How horrid! And how uncomfortable!"

"It is, I grant you. But we live in an uncomfortable world."

"Isn't the world largely what we make it?" said Helen softly.

"A week ago one would have said yes. But I've had a knock on the head since then. Everything is altered." He forced a sudden laugh which jarred a little on Helen's nerves. "But, to return to this diabolically clever old Chinaman. I'm swotting up his book, because this day fortnight—touching wood!—I shall be at Doe Hill at Rose Carburton's, and the great Lien Weng himself is expected to be there. So you see one is likely to hear a great deal about his theory."

"Rather too much about it, perhaps," said Helen chaffingly. "He might consider you a fit subject for one of his experiments."

Clearly she was not inclined to take Lien Weng too seriously. John for his part, however, was impressed by something he had read in a book which had caused a flutter in the dove cotes of science; or it may have been something he had heard as to the reputation of its writer. "Great discoveries are in the air," he said.

"No doubt," said Helen. "At any rate, George Hierons thinks so."

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"Hierons the inventor. You know him?"

"I used to know him at home. And I met him again, the first time for some years, at dinner the other night. He had just arrived from Ottawa, although like myself I'm proud to say he's an American citizen."

"Yes, a wonderful man. Another Edison, people seem to think. I met him in New York last year. He impressed me enormously. For a man still young he's gone a long way already on his own lines, and he's expected to go farther. His grasp of general world conditions and their relation to modern thought in its present state of continual flux was amazing."

Helen agreed. She too, was quite fascinated by him. Apart from his work, the importance of which could hardly be exaggerated, George Hierons had the mind of a seer.

There was a note, however, in this enthusiasm which suddenly cast Endor into an odd change of mood.

"Let us hope," he said, with a melancholy so intense that to Helen it was like a blow over the heart, "that he won't try too much. To me that seemed his danger. Wasn't it Goethe who said that man must learn first to know where his problem begins? Minds of the Hieron's type don't always recognize how small are the resources of humanity. The best, the wisest, the strongest, all are in chains. Man is a slave."

Helen was unready to accept so hard a saying.

"One can but read the riddle by the inner light," Endor went on. "Since this time last week I have

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shed many illusions. Now am I fully awake, having lived forty years, to the fact that man is chained in a galley or, if you prefer the figure, harnessed to a chariot with the Furies in charge."

Helen shivered at the strange light in his dark eyes.

"How many ages, through what æons of time this has been his lot there is no God to tell him. What mysteries he has profaned in the dim past, who shall say? But wherever the primal urge may lead, man has to follow."

She let her hand rest lightly in his. "How cold you are!" she said. "We had better go back to the house. I'm afraid you got up too soon on my account."

"Dearest—no!" Like a lover he pressed his lips upon her fingers. "I am quite well again in body. But I am what you might call a little "thrawn" and it is my duty to tell you. Now that I have had this knock on the head, you'll be taking a risk if you marry me."

The simple words in their deliberation plucked at Helen's heart. "Don't—don't say that!" she gasped.

"I love you too well, my darling, to keep you in the dark."

"You have a will." Her fingers tightened upon his. "Use it, I beg you—use it!"

"I must. I do. But I am in the grip of forces stronger than myself. I am called to battle with a monster. He is in my stars. And he will kill me . . . unless . . ."

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"Unless?"

She hung upon an answer which seemed an age in coming—an answer which in reality she had to force him to make.

"I kill him." Involuntarily his hand strayed to the bandage that had been fixed above his right eye. "It is not revenge. It is far more than that . . . the job one was sent here to do . . . to remove a deadly menace from this unlucky world."

Helen fixed her eyes on the drawn face of the man she loved and believed in as she said slowly, "You'll surely do that if you don't lose heart. One of your powers can do anything."

"Less than a week ago that was my own opinion. Since then something terrible has happened." He forced a laugh which sounded harsh and unreal. "A knock on the head has changed all that. One realizes now what one is up against. What chance has a penny trumpet? Can it persuade the walls of Jericho to fall down? Can it drown the thunders of the U. P.?"

"Surely yes, if you have faith."

"Don't let us deceive ourselves. There are facts to face. This monster has been well called the Colossus. And his power is great. In this country, at least, he is the absolute dictator of public opinion. Controlling the wires in the way he does—nearly every newspaper in the United Kingdom has now been forced by the mere cost of its production to enter his Trust—he sways these islands from end to end. At Hellington

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it was incredible what a plain, uncolored lie could do in so short a time. They simply wouldn't hear me. All morning journals had sung together. And a Fleet Street Lucifer, a twopence-daily antichrist, had composed the tune."

Grief, concern, pity were in the face of Helen.

"One had always hoped and felt," he went on with anger stifling his voice, "that this noise and vanity, this catchpenny patriotism, this lipservice to the majority, this bag of cheap tricks, don't really count—in the sum of things. But they do. Hellington teaches one that. The malign force that lured the Hun to his doom is now about to deal with what remains of civilization."

"But why? . . . but why? . . . but why?"

"The ambition of Saul Hartz is insensate. Like all of his kind before him, he doesn't know when to stop. By that sin fell the angels. Cheap, debased, vulgarized he may be, but he is still Lucifer, Son of the Morning, in up-to-date clothes."

Helen, while she listened, was torn with pain. She loved this man. This creature of intuitions, now broken and tormented, had grown more than ever dear in the course of four terrible days. The desire to help him had never been so strong. He could read that in her compressed lips, her burning eyes. But very gentleman as he was, now the case was altered, now he could no longer count on the integrity of the central

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forces, he was ready, almost eager in his own despite to release her.

One thing was now clear. They must come to a decision. Again in the inward ear of Helen sounded that voice grim with menace: Under which king, Bezonian? To serve both was now impossible.

She didn't hesitate to tell this stricken, perhaps mortally stricken, gladiator, that she was wholly his. Yet no longer self-secure, a tide of doubt swept his mind.

"Take a little time," he said. "There is your own life to think of. It may be—I don't know—that I am no more than a half-crazy egoist; in any case, I have no right to involve you in what may prove the ruin of all our hopes. You have made a position for yourself. Something is due to your career. I have no right to drag you down, I have no right to sink your fine abilities in a cause which in my heart I feel to be already lost."

Not only the simplicity of the man, but his honesty in this hour of desolating weakness wrung her with pain. "I ask no more than to serve you in any way I can," she said, her face raised to his.

"I cannot take pity," he said. "Even though it is a gift which ennobles the giver. Too much is at stake for us—and for the world in which we live."

With more than a lover's tenderness which made her whole being quiver like the rays of light upon the path before them, he took her in his arms and pressed kisses upon her forehead and lips. In the next moment, even

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as she gave herself up body and soul to his embrace, he was able to fight his weakness again. With a shudder he let her go. "Don't let me drag you over the precipice," he said. "Nothing now may be able to save me. Therefore, if you still have the power, stand clear."

XXII

SAUL HARTZ, after a little weighing, that was half contemptuous, of the pros and cons of the matter, decided to accept Mrs. Carburton's invitation to Doe Hill. He did not know who was to be of the party, nor did he much care. That there would be a house full of entertaining people could be taken for granted.

Rose Carburton was a power in the social world. Her week-ends were famous. For a variety of reasons, not easy to define, the Colossus was seldom honored in this way. It was a little odd perhaps that a man whose flair for "news" took him everywhere on principle should not have found himself oftener in a house where it was generally to be had in liberal quantities. Doe Hill was by no means exclusive. Its doors were open pretty wide to the talents. Saul Hartz was just the kind of man the world would look to find there. He knew Mrs. Carburton in the way he knew so many people; at more than one dinner table he had come under the spell of her attraction, but this was the first time, in recent years at any rate, that she

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had shown a desire to carry farther a casual acquaintance.

The truth was, no doubt, that they didn't quite set one another's genius. Rose Carburton was something of *une maitresse femme* and the dark shadow of the Colossus had fallen not without menace, as was its way, across her path. Over and beyond the fact that she was one of the most accomplished stalkers of the lion in Europe, she had her private ideas, her philosophy of life, her point of view. She was far more than a mere hunter of notoriety. Not only were her political instincts highly developed, but she had a faculty not always given to her sex, of seeing things "in the round." Mindful of the commonweal she had learned to look ahead. It may have been that, to a gaze so far-seeing, Saul Hartz was the writing on the wall.

The Colossus had much to occupy his thoughts in the ten days that lay between the arrival of the Society's ukase and the visit to Doe Hill. When, how or by what means he would be called to its presence, no word was given him. This thing had come as a sharp and distinctly unpleasant shock, yet considering the matter with the poise of mind on which he prided himself, he did not pretend for a moment that it was in any sense a surprise. At the core of being was a nest of dark designs. Their nature had only to be suspected for powerful and implacable foes to take the field against him who dared to harbor them.

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He was most careful to keep his own counsel in the Office. No member of the staff, not even the *Planet's* editor, was given an inkling of the grisly secret he had locked away. All the same, his interview with Wygram, when at leisure he came to think it over, had a sobering effect. Wygram had brought home to him that his life was in grave danger.

For the time being, therefore, Saul Hartz gave up the project of issuing a challenge to Garland's murderers. It went against the grain, for the worst enemies of the Colossus allowed him to be no coward. He had a burning desire to divulge all that he knew, but apart from motives of prudence one consideration held him back.

The cat could only have been let out of the bag at a price. That price was the loss of his right-hand man, Bennet Gage. And this, at such a moment, was not to be thought of. Already he was deeply involved in a fight with the odds heavily against him. Life itself for Saul Hartz, was one interminable strife. And now at this supreme crisis, with his back to the wall, he must have all his forces mobilized and ready to his hand.

Moreover, the interview with Wygram had brought home to the Colossus that the police, whom he heartily despised and was ever ready to defy, were far better informed than himself on this dark subject. For once the U. P. secret service, one of his own pet creations, had been outshone. He had Wygram to thank for

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that. Rumor had not overpainted the powers of a remarkable man. In spite of the charlatan's mantle, which after all might be only a cloak to deceive the unwary, this man had a curious but undeniable faculty. It must be the aim of the U. P. to turn it later to full account.

Saul Hartz made no difference in his way of life. And under duress he was moved to an act of reparation in the matter of John Endor. True, the *amende* was tardy, not to say grudging, yet offered so skilfully as to rob it of any such appearance.

The U. P. freely circulated Mr. Endor's contradiction. It ate in public as much humble pie as was consistent with a sense of dignity. The *Planet*, that high-toned newspaper associated itself with this belated apology to Mr. Endor, but at the same time covered its tracks in its own inimitable fashion, by drawing a moral and adorning a tale. A trivial episode in the career of a minor politician had already had more attention paid to it than its nature called for in these strenuous days!

In regard to Helen Sholto, new difficulties arose. She had declined on any terms to take charge of the new journal for women. It had not been easy to make up her mind, since none knew better than she what a prize she was giving up. Nor was it easy for Saul Hartz to yield to this decision. A man of imperious will, the habit of gratifying it had become second nature. For once, however, he had gone the wrong way

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to work. He had counted on being able, in the last resort, to force the hand of an ambitious and brilliant woman. When squarely put to a choice between a ruined John Endor and a triumphant U. P. with the advantages of the one, and the disabilities of the other in the scale, he felt pretty sure that common sense must gain the day.

That it had not done so was annoying. He had the highest opinion of this young woman. Emphatically she was beginning to count with her own sex. An agile pen, a clear perception, a quick tongue, a fine presence were winning an ever-growing authority on the lecture platform and in the press. Maker and un-maker of reputations, as the Colossus secretly flattered himself that he was, it went to his heart that one to whom he was ready to offer a crown should cross over to the camp of a weak and insignificant enemy—an enemy who, in point of fact, was already broken.

Moreover, she had resigned her position in the Office. That she was still there was because Saul Hartz was entitled to claim due notice of the termination of the contract. But there was no open breach in their relations. Even if his misprison was as grave as John Endor declared it to be, and now that Helen's eyes were open, all things conspired to make the fact more credible, she could not forget the past, nor could she quite overcome the curious power of the man himself.

Much was about to happen to John and Helen, and to this subtle foe who was bent on the destruction of

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the one, and who, besides, was fully determined that the other should be made to serve his will. Ten days passed, however, without a hint of the cards that destiny was about to play. In the Office things went on as usual. Saul Hartz was inclined to believe—like the Iron Duke he was in a situation much exposed to fools he always said—that the mandate from the Council of Seven was a hoax and that there would be no developments, when the time came to keep his week-end engagement at Doe Hill.

XXIII

ON Saturday afternoon Saul Hartz left London by the 3:20 from Paddington. It was a long and full train and the Colossus whose habit was to travel *en prince* whenever possible, had, in spite of all that his equerry could do, to share a carriage with other passengers. Slight attention was paid to these. Acutely observant on occasion of the world around him he could also be the reverse. And now as he entered the compartment and took the seat that had been retained for him in the corner next the door, he gave to his fellow travelers, of whom there were three, a glance so perfunctory that it told nothing. He proceeded to immerse himself in a memoir of a publicist lately dead whom he had intimately known. It amused him to compare his own estimate of the man with that presented to the world in this official biography.

When the train stopped at Slough, two of the other occupants of the carriage got out, leaving the one who remained in the corner farthest from Saul Hartz. At first, the Colossus paid him no more attention than before, but as the train began to move out of the station,

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he chanced to look up from the book whose naïveté had palled already, and suddenly caught the eye of his fellow traveler.

It was the eye of John Endor.

The two men had a nodding acquaintance with each other. All the personalities of the time were known to Saul Hartz. He went everywhere, he rubbed shoulders continually with the celebrated, the notorious, in fact with all the members of that heterogeneous body who from whatever cause are large in the public eye. John Endor was not yet forty but he was a figure already in the life of the time.

The Colossus never forgot a face. And he never forgot any material fact that was involved in the process of recognition. His glance was held at once, less by John Endor than by an ugly bruise above the right eye. Seeing it, he gave a slight start. Involuntarily his gaze fell to the eyes beneath, and again he started, this time, at their look of open, implacable enmity.

Saul Hartz smiled. On all occasions his power of recovery was automatic. As became one who saw himself as a modern dictator, he allowed nothing to come between the wind and his nobility.

The eyes of John Endor would have quelled a lesser man. They merely goaded the Colossus into action.

"I wonder if we are going to the same place." Hartz's voice, which seldom rose above a husky wheeze and yet had the power of carrying a great distance, had a note of half insolent *bonhomie*. It had, too, the com-

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placence of one who does not disguise that he has sized up all things in the visible universe. Not for him the irritating reserves, the conventional glosses of "the English gentleman." Sublime faith in himself and a stupendous power of will enabled him to ride straight at every obstacle in his path. He knew that he could and would surmount it.

No answer having greeted his remark, the Colossus slowly repeated it.

"Mr. Hartz?" The tentativeness of John Endor was emphasized by a quick fall of the eyelids.

The owner of the *Planet* smiled affirmatively. "My first visit to Doe Hill," he said. "A beautiful Tudor house, I'm told. I suppose you know it well."

"I've been there several times." Endor's cold politeness let it be seen that he was not in a mood to talk. "Shakespeare and the musical glasses."

The Colossus, however, declined to be put off. He had things to say to this man, and he was going to say them. Between the two was an antagonism that was absolutely deadly, but so well was each versed in the rules of the game that a third person not sharing their grim secret could never have guessed it.

"Who'll be there?" said Hartz in a light tone.

Endor was unable to say.

"Our dear Helen Sholto for one, perhaps." The genial voice was full of charm.

John Endor believed not. And to hear that name on the lips of the man opposite was a little more than

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he could bear. He let down the window with a jerk.

"By the way, congratulations—hearty congratulations." The husky wheeze floating across the compartment seemed to grow more virile. "A lucky—a very lucky fellow. I hope you know—but of course, you *do* know—what a prize—an altogether exceptional prize—you have drawn in the lottery."

Endor returned icy thanks. With all the aristocrat's power of defending himself at close quarters, he began to feel that the man opposite was too much for him.

"Of course,"—the Colossus was almost like a kitten with a skein of wool—"I shall always owe you a grudge for stealing her from me."

Gentle, half amused as were the words, behind them was a glint of steel. Endor, in spite of a disciplined will, could not resist its challenge.

"Not quite a pretty way of putting it," he said. And there was a nip in his voice.

"*Rien qui blesse comme la vérité.*" The laugh of the Colossus had now a singular lack of music. "Helen Sholto was my right hand, my other self almost. She understood my ways. I don't know what I shall do without her."

Endor had only a conventional regret to offer for having robbed his enemy of so rare a treasure. He may have felt that the note of lamentation was pitched dangerously high, or again, knowing this man for what he was, he may have been seeking a motive behind it.

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The Colossus, however, with an odd concentration of voice and eye, went on developing the theme in his own peculiar manner.

"She was everything to me," he said. "Just—everything."

Somehow that husky wheeze put John in mind of a Californian rattler he had heard more than once in his travels. It now struck right home to his heart.

"Everything is a big word." He tried to keep his voice level, but restrain himself as he might he was beginning to see red.

"A big word—yes—I agree." The wheeze became a snarl of subtle contempt. "But in this case it's the only one you see."

Helen's lover had an illusion of fangs striking his flesh.

"What do you mean?" he demanded with savage eyes.

Saul Hartz shrugged contemptuously and spread his hands like a stage Frenchman.

In the vain hope of freeing his veins of a poison, Endor repeated a futile question. With a skill, in itself a mockery, his enemy tossed it lightly into the air.

"Isn't it better in some cases," he said, picking each word with the fetid delicacy of a Baudelaire, "to leave, my dear friend, just a little to the imagination?"

The words in the ear of John Endor were those of a devil. He could but gasp. There was no mistaking their implication. Looking squarely across at the man

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seated in the far corner of the carriage, he saw the image of one capable of doing evil for the love of it. A monster of wickedness confronted him. But in this moment of suffering, his thought was less of the woman he loved than of the country he adored. By what cruel turn of Fate's shuttle had she, the conqueror of half the world, been conquered by antichrist himself?

This secret power behind the great movements of the time, this framer of policies, foreign and domestic, this boss of all bosses, this big serpent who swallowed the little serpents, what a commentary he was on the world that he governed! Was it possible, that in the act of recoil from the highest moment in her history, Civilization should now be in bondage to a mere beast!

Still looking at the hooded eyes of the man opposite, a strange light came into those of John Endor. As in a glass darkly he saw the final degradation, the ultimate doom of the thing he loved beyond all other things. "One with Nineveh and Tyre." How often had antichrist, and with what a gusto, blazoned these words in the pages of his own newspapers. He even printed them in Greek on appropriate occasions. Cynicism raised to this power was the perquisite of no common man.

Man he hardly seemed to be as there he sat, looking at the light in the face of John Endor and yet characteristically heedless of its cause. Truly, the mind becomes subdued to that in which it works! Having, with his insight into modern mechanical conditions, be-

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mused the five continents of the world by diabolonian arts, he saw himself now with the world at his feet, and in his grasp all the strings of the U. P.—that latter-day symbol of the supreme power.

Endor might well despair of his country. A sort of blind fury swept him as the thought of its impotence flooded his mind. Sheer force of will was needed to choke back that tide of rage. The man opposite, reading his heart like a page of news tensed his muscles, held himself ready. Even if the true cause of Endor's violence was not yet revealed to Saul Hartz, he knew that he had goaded to the breaking point one whose nerves were overstrung.

The Colossus, however, was not afraid. He was ready for Endor's expected onset. Of powerful physique, in the prime of manhood, he neither smoked nor drank too much; he rode two hours daily and in youth he had studied the arts of self-defense under the best masters.

Let this mad fool come on! He would find waiting for him a pretty old-fashioned customer.

XXIV

HAPPILY for the credit of two distinguished men, the train began at once to slow up and Dowling Junction came in view. This chanced to be the station for Doe Hill. Saul Hartz opened the carriage door promptly and got out. Endor got out too.

Outside, in the station yard, three private motors awaited the train's arrival. Others of the week-end party were clearly expected. One man, in point of fact, was already in conversation with the chauffeur of the first vehicle by the time Hartz and Endor arrived on the scene. This man, tall and arresting, with the open, alert look of the best type of American, would have been a striking figure anywhere. George Heirons by name, his reputation had spread already through two hemispheres as that of an audaciously progressive thinker; one of a chosen band of pioneers in the world of mind whom many conceived likely to revolutionize modern conditions, social, economic and industrial.

As soon as Endor saw the dominant figure of George

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Hierons he went straight up to him and with an impulsiveness delightfully frank, grasped his hand.

"My dear fellow," he said, "how good—how very good to see you! When did you reach this country?"

"Ten days ago," said Hierons, shaking hands cordially.

Saul Hartz, who had met Hierons more than once in New York, came up also with a salutation. The proffered hand, however, was declined by the American, who significantly turned aside to greet a remarkable personage who at that moment, with slow dignity, was approaching the little group round the first motor. A grave and reverend Celestial, gorgeous in a jacket of yellow brocade, and the regalia of a high and exclusive order of his race, exchanged a low bow with George Hierons. The American at once presented John Endor to this dignitary, but the controller of the U. P., although he pressed forward for the obvious purpose of being included in this ceremony, was left out in the cold. There could be no mistaking the icy antagonism with which both men regarded him; there could be no mistaking that such an emotion was fully shared by John Endor. The manner in which all three moved towards the door of the second motor, leaving Saul Hartz stranded high and dry in sole possession of the first, seemed to drive the fact home.

The Colossus, aware that a public affront had been given him, turned upon his heel not without a hint of disdain. His bearing as he entered the first car,

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alone, was calm indifference. He cared for none, he feared none; moreover, he prided himself upon his power of wiping off old scores and paying grudges with interest. The car waited a minute or two to give other arrivals an opportunity of joining him. None did so; and the first of the three cars started for Doe Hill with Saul Hartz its sole occupant.

As it began to move, there flashed across the mind of the Colossus the warning of the man Wygram in regard to Lien Weng, the Chinese occultist. And it came upon him now with the force of a definite action. Instantly he knew, without a shade of doubt, that he was in the toils of the Society of the Friends of Peace. Even for one of Saul Hartz's iron nerve, such an intuition was not agreeable. Too much was known of the activities of the Council of Seven, its far-reaching yet dark power had been too recently demonstrated for such a fact to be lightly held.

Saul Hartz lit a cigar and then gave careful thought to a decidedly unpleasant situation. What should he do?

Uppermost, for a moment, was an instinct to tell the chauffeur to drive him back to the station, so that he might return to London by the next train. Only a madman or a fool would walk open-eyed into a den of declared enemies, particularly when they bore the indelible brand of fanatics and murderers.

There was nothing of the weakling, however, about Saul Hartz. He could never have reached his present significance in the scheme of things had there been any

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taint of will. Less than half a good cigar was needed to convince him that flight would serve no purpose. Besides, what direct evidence was there? And even if the case was as he feared, soon or late the music would have to be faced. Such an organization, in the light of evidence his own private agents had laboriously collected during the past two years, was too powerful for one of its chosen victims to thwart it by running away and hiding his head in sand.

At the back of everything, moreover, and in the last resort was the *élan vital* of the born fighter. Saul Hartz loved danger for its own sake. War, in the inmost fiber of his nature, was the sweetest of all mistresses. He was the last man in the world to yield to a mere threat.

Let this *Vehmgericht* do its worst!

XXV

THE reception of the Colossus by the châtelain of Doe Hill was instinct with charm. Rose Carburton, as accomplished a hostess as the Old World could show, had the art of shining like a rare jewel in an exquisite setting. And hers the imperious magnetism to which all men yield. Highly sexed, a siren, an enchantress, she never forgot in mid-career the painfully difficult lessons learned in early youth.

Ridden by no sect, truckling to no class, Rose Carburton cast her net wide. The widow of a man of fabulous wealth, one of her ambitions had been to make Doe Hill the most interesting house in Britain. This she was in a fair way to achieve. At any rate, the representative few of many diverse worlds were glad to visit this famous trysting place to meet their kind.

The party for the week-end was not large but it had been chosen with care. Comprising eight men and four women, at dinner they mustered thirteen. Although the hostess jested gayly, Saul Hartz in his present frame of mind was not proof altogether against the omen. Casting a dubious eye along the table he

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scrutinized his fellow guests. His gaze was caught at once by the ascetic visage of Lien Weng. The Celestial in the magnificent robes of a high order of mandarins was an awe-inspiring figure. Such a man seemed to bear the centuries on his brow and in the deep lines of an impassive face. He spoke little, but his English was choice, with hardly a trace of accent; his every word was ripe, his every gesture pregnant with meaning.

Seated next but one to Lien Weng was an old gray-bearded Hindu, the famous sage and philosopher Bandar Ali. The controller of the Universal Press, who plumed himself justly on the encyclopedic nature of his mind, knew this old man as one whose name was familiar throughout the East. Opposite was Roland Holles, a combination almost unique, of poet, sportsman, publicist, seer, Kentish squire, and member of an old family who scandalized his relations and alienated his friends by a rooted antagonism to the British Empire. On the right of the hostess was De Tournel, *litterateur* and *homme du monde*, unsparing critic of all religions and most advanced of thinkers; on her left was Hierons the American. The other men at the table were John Endor and El Santo, the Spanish mystic.

The women, even with the hostess left out, were hardly less interesting; the venerable Marchesa della Gardia who had spent a long life fighting for Italy; the awe-inspiring Madame Kornileff who had braved

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Siberia for her opinions; Pauline Verdet, widow of the great chemist who so recently had discovered a new element and had forfeited his life in the process; and Ethel Bergman, a woman of vast possessions, only child of a great inventor who had inherited much of her father's genius. These people, seated dourly round that solemn mahogany, were a company whose significance even a house with the traditions of Doe Hill could seldom, if ever, have equaled.

To a man like Saul Hartz, the range of whose information allowed him to know exactly who these persons were and what they stood for, such a gathering was in itself a portent. So formidable was its collective effect that for once his habitual self-confidence threatened to desert him. As revealed by the tempered rays of the softly shaded candles, there was something sinister in those twelve faces.

The talk at the dinner table ministered to this impression. There was little of the light give and take, of the cheerful wit, of the loosing of the voice for the love of hearing it, peculiar to these occasions. Low tones embodied words weighty and considered; all seemed preoccupied with large issues, grave things.

Saul Hartz was soon alive to the fact that he was rather being given the cold shoulder. In such a picked company of intellectuals, even he might expect to feel a little out of it. Such indeed was his sense of isolation that several times that evening the Colossus was fain to ask himself why he had been invited to meet

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these people. And for his severely logical mind there could be only one answer.

He could have wished that he had not come. All the same, the love of adventure was rooted in him. And deep in his heart was the arrogance of one who knows that he has the master-key to human nature. No matter how imposing its airs, human nature can never be more than itself, an affair of pygmies. In relation to others, even if they comprised the world's flower, he saw himself a giant. So far, he had carried everything to victory. All that he handled turned to gold. His was the Midas touch. Let those cranks and visionaries do their worst. He did not fear them; he did not fear mortal men. And they would do well to look to themselves. As controller of that amazing engine, the Universal Press, Saul Hartz firmly believed that he wielded the mightiest power of the modern world.

If the atmosphere of the dining room had been heavy to the verge of the baleful, that of the ancient library, whither the men retired with their coffee and cigars, was no less suffocating. Hartz's educated palate had been regaled with a *cordon bleu* and vintage wines, the brandy was old and the cigars not unworthy of it, but, in spite of these things, he was unable to throw off the feeling that a sword was hanging over his head. Somehow, the other seven men held intercourse in a language to which he had not a key. Their words were few and fragmentary, but they held esoteric mean-

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ings. As the time passed, Hartz's conviction grew that these men were assembled for a dark purpose. When at last he decided to look for consolation elsewhere, his withdrawal from the library seemed to provoke a keen sense of relief.

It was ten o'clock. He sought the ladies in various stately rooms, but already they appeared to have gone to bed. Thoroughly depressed by now, the Colossus felt that he could not do better than follow this example.

His bedroom was at the end of a long cavernous-looking corridor. The room was large, magnificently upholstered and full of Louis Seize furniture, an apartment, in fact, which *le grand monarque* himself might have condescended to sleep in. Yet, to the senses of its present occupant, now so acutely strung, it gave a feeling of the uncanny. Shadows lurked round the canopied bed; in spite of the thick carpet, the floor seemed a thing of echoes as he walked across it; the great shutters of the windows with their look of medieval solidity might have hid some magic casement; above all, the dark lights springing from the black oak paneling were weird and strange. None knew better than Saul Hartz how to ride imagination on the curb, yet as he slowly and rather unwillingly undressed, he felt that in such a room anything might happen.

Impatient with himself he switched off the light and got into bed. But never had he felt so little like sleep. Something was afoot in this old house. Just what it was he could not say, and yet he was sure it concerned

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him intimately. His mind was a nest of fancies. The second glass of port might have been a mistake, or the oysters might have upset him, for by some means, the room in which he lay was now alive with the evil spirit of the Middle Ages. Who knew what black arts, what latent devilries lurked behind its tapestry? Would this ancient bed in which he felt so uncomfortable be let down into a secret vault wherein a *Vehmgericht* was assembled? Would these mysterious walls recede to disclose a Secret Council in session? Lying impotently there, his mind grew morbid. He was almost tempted to ring for his servant that he might have company.

What was in the wind? Downstairs in the library something was afoot. The frigid politeness of his fellow guests returned to him with new meaning. All these people, men and women alike, nobly and variously gifted as they were, had a taint of fanaticism. It was idle to deny that he was lying in the midst of danger.

A man of less force might have been tempted to blame his own folly in lying there at all. But Saul Hartz neither repined nor looked back. All experience was good. This was a real adventure. Besides having at last fallen foul of this precious Society, soon or late he would have to face it. So far as he was concerned, it might as well be now. He knew the grim record of the Council of Seven, but he would not swerve an inch from the course already prescribed for himself. It should not be easy to terrorize Saul Hartz.

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And even if life itself was the stake, was life, after all, such a very great matter?

Lying there, with sleep far from his pillow, he sought to arrange his mind and put his affairs in order. He felt it likely that he would never leave that room alive, but the premonition did not lessen his scorn of others. For that remorseless mind there could be no hereafter. The position he took up was that of a philosopher known to the recent past: "He knew there had been one ice age, and he believed there was going to be another." A bundle of primal instincts, he merely followed his appetites.

Saul Hartz had an appetite for power. Up till the very moment of entering that room he had considered himself beyond good and evil. But as he lay, waves of thought leaped upon him from those walls. Conspiracy was in the air. Certain forces meant to break him. And how easy to achieve. A drop of poison in a cup of coffee, a knife, or a pistol shot, a knock on the head in the dark, a push, neatly timed, onto a live rail of the Underground, and all would be over. So far as the Colossus was concerned, that would be the end. Let it be so. After all, he had read the Riddle of the Sphinx. Knowing all, there was nothing to know.

He pressed a button of his devil's machine, and wheat rose five shillings a bushel in Europe; he pressed another button, and half a continent was removed from the comity of nations. But what did it matter? In the

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sight of Saul Hartz the planet Earth was but a grain of sand on the tideway of eternity. Organic life was a negation of a negation, yet from the first, he had been ready to pay a full price for supreme power. But now it had come to him, it wrought no appeasement of the cosmic sense. Man he was and man he must remain.

It was probable that he was entering upon his last hours, but he made no oblation to a God in which he did not believe. Pursuing the laws of reason with remorseless logic, he had made of himself a god. At the dawn of consciousness he had seen the self in pictures, till now, at the threshold of the night of time, he saw himself as antichrist. His brain, as he had always known, was adapted just a little better to the modern one-hell-of-a-muss than that of any other adventurous insect. It enabled him to get, with a minimum of effort, all the things he sought in the material world. They did not bring happiness, but he did not look for it. Such an abortion as man had no claims to beatitude. For man in his very nature was a hybrid, a contradiction, a grotesque in whom the elements must be ever at war. Let him never seek peace on earth, and as far as heaven was concerned, granting that it existed, what a place of exquisite boredom it must be!

Long hours the Colossus lay searching his heart and then, finally, he drew the bedclothes over his head and decided to go down fighting. To go down fighting—that would be the ultimate bliss for one who made no

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terms with life. After all, the lust for power was greater than the will to live.

Lying there, hour after hour, in the uncanny silence of that room, the conviction had grown until now it enfolded him like the arms of a woman, that the sleep upon which he was about to enter would be his last. This brief but intense review of experience had pierced him so deeply that it began to seem certain that the end was now near.

At last, he fell into a doze. But hardly had consciousness left him, when, with a violent start, he awoke. Somebody had entered the room. The electric light next the door had been switched on. He sat up in bed to confront a face drawn and haggard, and a pair of eyes somber, ruthless, terrible.

They were the eyes of John Endor.

XXVI

FOR a space of ten seconds or so, the two men stared at one another. And then Saul Hartz, once more the human animal, took himself strongly in hand.

Automatically his fists clenched. A revolver . . . a knife . . . a corrosive acid . . . unless he sprang at once he would not be given a chance to get one in before the *Vehmgericht* put up his number!

"I beg your pardon!" The intruder's polite voice came not an instant too soon. "If I have disturbed you I am sorry. I thought this was my room. It must be next door."

"An easy mistake to make in the dark." Almost at once Saul Hartz was in full command of the situation.

Endor prepared to withdraw.

"Off to bed late, aren't you? What's the time?" The Colossus looked at his watch. "Nearly a quarter to four."

Surprise flashed across Endor's dark face "So late!" he said.

"Given up to highbrow talk down below, eh?" Hartz's cold laugh did not try to conceal the sneer

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behind it. "Setting the affairs of the universe in order, I daresay."

The answer of John Endor was icy, venomous, slow. "Of the *Planet* at any rate."

"So!" said the Colossus. "One guessed your program was ambitious. Maybe you'll find the affairs of the *Planet* a pretty tough problem, my friend." And there was a challenge in his voice and in his eyes.

Endor's face grew darker. "No doubt," he said aloofly. And then, without another word, he turned abruptly and lurched a little unsteadily out of the room. As he did so he switched off the light.

The Colossus was able to get an hour or two of troubled sleep. But it was disturbed by bad dreams. Take it altogether it was perhaps the least agreeable night he had ever spent. The arrival of his servant at eight o'clock with tea and shaving water came as a real relief. Never had daylight been quite so welcome. But it was a prelude to a day of tedium broken now and then by moments of acute embarrassment. The other men continued to keep him at arm's length, and he was at no pains to disguise that he fully reciprocated their feelings. Besides, much of their time seemed to be passed in anxious conclave, of which, although conducted in secret with all the privacy of closed doors, he was not slow to guess the nature.

As far as the women were concerned, he did not get on much better. His hostess, a creature of rare accomplishment and charm, was not at all at ease in her

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brief and fragmentary conversations with him. By the others he was frankly bored. They belonged to the pure milk of the intellectual. Disdaining the feminine arts altogether, they had that rather distressing mental acuteness of which men of equal or superior caliber are apt to fight very shy.

It occurred to Saul Hartz, as soon as luncheon was over, that his wisest course in the circumstances would be to return at once to town. Sorely was he tempted to this, but to begin with there was no Sunday train, and even if a motor could be obtained, the journey was considerably more than a hundred miles. It would be an affront, moreover, to the hostess, although perhaps the Colossus was the last man in the world with whom a consideration of that kind was likely to weigh.

But when all was said, what really enabled Saul Hartz to face another day of Doe Hill was the situation itself. The feeling obsessed him that something was about to happen. And whatever the something might be, he was not the man to shirk it.

The day wore on, however, and nothing occurred. Grim faces, hostile looks were on every hand, but they did not culminate in any overt act. And the hostess with her immense social experience was able to ease the tension a little. But the Colossus provided a rare test for her powers. He seldom opened his heart to a woman. And with bitter enemies on every side, he retired very much into his shell. Howbeit, even he could not resist the allure of Rose Carburton. She was

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so very much a woman of the world that in the course of the day, as the crown of many attempts, she made some impact upon a reserve that was indeed formidable.

After tea, while she was showing him a rare collection of miniatures, it suddenly occurred to Saul Hartz that through the medium of this woman there might be a hope of getting a line as to the Society's attitude towards himself. Some hint, also, might be forthcoming of the course it was likely to follow.

Characteristically, he began by asking point blank if she were a member of it. She fenced adroitly, with infinite wit in the use of the foils, but he pressed her hard. He meant to have the truth; and the sense of its importance her dexterity confessed nerved him to tear it from her. Force of reasoning took it captive in the end, not that the penetration of a Solomon was called for in the process.

"And what, pray, do you think you are going to achieve with your mumbo jumbo?" he asked, suddenly spinning the button off his foil. "It is wrong in ethics, it stands outside the law, it is an affront to religion, it is opposed to the deepest instincts of the human race."

Mrs. Carburton said cautiously that the rules of the Society did not permit its case to be argued. But its members sincerely believed that by fearless coöperative action they could do permanent good to the world.

Saul Hartz took leave to doubt it. And to kill a man because one did not happen to agree with his

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opinions, gloss it over as one might, was simple murder.

"But does it kill people?" said Mrs. Carburton, with a slow and steady widening of fine gray eyes.

Was this real innocence? Or did she merely think him a fool? His stern eyes questioned her candid ones, but they told him nothing.

"In effect," said Saul Hartz brutally, "this Society is a murder club. Barely a fortnight ago the unfortunate Garland was done to death by it."

"A coroner's jury," said Rose Carburton, "declared William Garland's death to be from an unknown cause."

"The cause is not unknown to the Council of Seven."

"I do not belong to the Council," said Rose Carburton simply. "No woman does. But speaking as an ordinary member of society—we'll dispense with the 'the'—from the bottom of my heart I rejoice that a man so infamous as William Garland is no longer able to do harm to his fellow creatures."

"Infamous is a strong word."

"No man ever won a better right to it than William Garland."

"You can only know that by hearsay—even granting, as one may—that Garland was a thoroughly 'bad hat.'"

Rose Carburton smiled faintly and shook a mournful head. "On the contrary, William Garland had a trial long, full and fair, if ever man had. Evidence was collected and most carefully weighed, and it was proven beyond a doubt that Garland's aim was to set

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class against class. By making the world no place for honest and peaceful folk to live in, he hoped to become a sort of glorified Trotsky or Lenin."

"And on these vague grounds a fortuitous body of persons takes upon itself to murder him."

"That is a matter in which one is only too glad to remain in ignorance," said Rose Carburton. "But at least one realizes," she fervently added, "that the world is a sweeter and cleaner place now that Garland is no longer in it."

"It may be so," said Saul Hartz sternly. "On that point I offer no opinion. But who and what, pray, is this Society, that it should arrogate to itself the right to take these extreme measures?"

"It is composed," said Rose Carburton, "of the ablest, the most disinterested, the most humane minds of all countries, and, as I understand, it has one object in view and one object alone—to conserve by every means in its power the peace of the world."

Saul Hartz laughed contemptuously. "As though by carrying on a private vendetta, it can do anything of the kind."

"It does not aim at reprisal. Personal animus has no place in the scheme. In sum it is the last resort, the Final Court of Appeal of the Weak against the Strong."

"Sheer anarchy," said Saul Hartz. "It is subversive of every law of God and Man."

Rose Carburton held her ground bravely. "It is a

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heroic attempt to adjust the balance of power. Certain minds in the world of public affairs—and it is only one world among many—are now in full control of the wires which hold society together. These minds stand for negation. At the beck of private ambition of an ignoble kind, they are prepared to override all that is human, all that is divine. So long as they can fill the world with war and the rumor of war they thrive. In the end, of course, Fate itself will deal with them, but only at an awful cost to the helpless and the innocent. Had society had the power in 1912 to remove Wilhelm II and the small group of men around him, it is almost certain that the cataclysm which has so nearly destroyed the civilization of the West would have been averted."

Saul Hartz took leave to doubt it.

XXVII

DINNER that evening was again a cheerless meal. It was hard to say why. All that wealth, discriminating taste, the social arts could devise was there in profusion. There was an absence of ceremony. Taken as individuals nothing could have exceeded the personal attraction of those who graced the famous Doe Hill mahogany, but in a subtle way and for some hidden reason they refused to coalesce.

Some of the foremost minds of the world had come together. On a normal occasion the talk of such people must have been copious, salt, full of marrow; this evening it was tentative, halting, spineless; the hearts and minds of the speakers were too plainly not in it.

A skeleton was at the feast. Of that fact Saul Hartz was fully aware. From the moment of arrival the previous day a deadly sense of being in the enemy's camp had oppressed him. All that had happened since, outwardly unimportant though it was, had ministered to it. Each one of these people, even the hostess herself seemed, so far as possible, to avoid him. They were forever looking the other way; even in moments of unavoidable intercourse he felt an odd

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constraint. And this evening, in spite of the *mise en scene*, an almost positive sense of disharmony reached a climax. Course by course the conversation waned. By the time the meal was at an end, silence hung like a pall over the whole table.

When the ladies left the room, the eight men who remained were conscious of a momentary lifting of the cloud. But they stayed only a short time circulating the decanters. A move was made once more to that wonderful room, the library, whose walls had been furnished so liberally with the world's wisdom, for the most part in bindings choice and rare. The somber magnificence of the drawn curtains, the soft radiance of the candelabra, the glow from the open hearth, lent to the scene an austere dignity that was felt by all. Coffee and cigars, and even the fine liqueurs which were promptly dispensed, came almost as a desecration to such a sacramental atmosphere.

Less than five minutes after the servants had gone, Lien Weng gave a quiet signal. The American, George Hierons, and the Frenchman de Tournel rose abruptly from their chairs and proceeded at once to lock the two doors of the room. With a ceremonious bow they handed the keys to Lien Weng.

The Chinaman turned to face Saul Hartz. "Sir, the Court is now constituted," he said without a trace of emotion. His English was perfect, but there was a curiously soft inflection in the low voice.

Saul Hartz, defiance in his air, merely shrugged con-

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temptuous shoulders. Every sense keenly strung, he had been apprised by this overt act even before it came.

"My good friends have done me the honor," Lien Weng continued in a voice whose timbre was persuasion itself, "to invite me to conduct these wholly informal proceedings."

"And you might add 'wholly illegal' while you are about it," said the Colossus with a sudden gust of anger.

Lien Weng raised a finger with a gravity verging upon the pontifical. "Legal—illegal—are words—words. This Court—this Council of Seven deals only with realities."

"Golf balls a shilling!" In order to express an utter contempt the Colossus spat in the fire.

"Words—phrases!" The courtesy of a very old civilization rooted in an immemorial past was in the deep smile of Lien Weng. "I ask you, sir, to believe that as far as this world is concerned we are about to deal with a matter of life and death."

Another gust of rage swept Saul Hartz. "About to murder me, eh?" he said savagely, "as you murdered Garland the other day, not to mention Kornileff the Russian, and Yamotoga the Jap, and heaven knows who besides!"

When the Colossus had spoken he got up from his chair.

"Be seated, pray," said Lien Weng with his priest's smile. "It will be more agreeable for all if you stay as you were."

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"If you intend to stick a knife in me and put me underneath that"—Saul Hartz pointed to the yawning Tudor fireplace which might easily have concealed a chasm—"get through with it at once. I'm not in a mood for cat and mouse."

Lien Weng certainly looked feline enough as he narrowed his eyes and yet distended their pupils. His subtle face was luminous with meaning. "You will be unwise," he said simply, "not to hear all that is said to you. It is not our wish to go to the extreme. Sir, your case has received much consideration. It is our prayer that we may deal with it in the way of wisdom. I will not add in the way of mercy and justice, for 'mercy,' 'justice,' those too are words, and the Council of Seven deals only with things. And yet its every act is governed by the ideals we serve. This Council is pledged to do the will of the Time-Spirit with as little suffering or unhappiness to the object of its attentions as may consist with the high and noble aim it has in view."

Saul Hartz, still standing, folded his arms defiantly. But the cold force of the speaker was not without effect. In spite of a bitter and deep hostility the Colossus was obliged to abate his anger to the point of listening to every word spoken by this remarkable man.

"Sir," continued the President of the Council with the same icy politeness, "you will do well to know just what it is that has constituted you the enemy of the human race. In the fewest possible words I shall hope

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to make that clear to you. A man of truly remarkable gifts, a man of creative imagination in the world of common affairs, you have so adapted your brain to the new order evolved by modern civilization that you have gained control of the sinister machine which evokes, creates, molds and directs public opinion. That is a feat of which our Society makes no complaint. But having acquired by the exercise of your genius this stupendous power in the physical world, you are proved to be totally lacking, as was Napoleon, your prototype before you, in any true or vital sense of the awful responsibility such a gift confers upon you."

Each word of this speech Saul Hartz followed with care. But as the gravamen of the charge was unfolded, he took up Lien Weng sharply.

"By what authority," he interposed violently, "are you and your fellow fanatics"—he cast a glance of savage contempt at the pale, tense faces around him—"constituted your brother's keeper?"

"By that same authority," said Lien Weng, "which confers upon you the power you wield."

"Whatever power I may wield," said Saul Hartz, "has the sanction of the law."

"Of what law?"

"The law implicit in the usages of all civilized communities."

"Sir, there we join issue."

Lien Weng looked solemnly at the others. With an oriental gravity that raised the act to the plane of ritual,

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he took a signet ring from the first finger of his right hand, for no apparent reason pressed it to his lips and then put it back again. "No law," he went on in the same unchanging voice, "of man's contrivance can be effective unless there lies behind the moral power to enforce it."

"I agree."

"Perhaps you do not realize that you and your friends, the members of this infamous International Newspaper Ring, are no longer to be permitted to carry out the policy for which you stand."

"What is the policy for which we stand?"

"Giantism—world-power—in other words, enslavement and spoliation of the weak."

"Arrant nonsense!"

"We shall gain nothing," said Lien Weng "by bandying words. It has taken the Society of the Friends of Peace many months to reach a conclusion in this case of yours; and it has done so only after complete investigation of all the salient facts. Understand, sir, that all its verdicts are based upon reason, and that once moved to action it pursues an undeviating, a relentless course."

Saul Hartz made a gesture of contempt. "You are an illegal body. At best you are a murder club. You stand outside the law."

"Not outside the moral law. Take the case of the teeming, helpless millions of my Chinese compatriots for whom I speak, of those millions of unlucky crea-

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tures who know themselves impotent to deal with the marvelous physical forces now controlled by the western mind. For months, through the agency of your terrible engine the Universal Press, you have been inciting your Government to shatter Peking. For months, to this end you have been organizing public opinion by means of false news and distorted facts. Once the die is cast the yellow and black races are powerless to cope with the airships, the poison gases, the high explosives, the dread magics the civilization of the West is able to hurl upon them. Not a month ago you caused to be wiped out of existence, by means of bombs rained from the clouds, a native village in the heart of Africa. Not a year ago a similar thing occurred in Afghanistan in Upper India."

"You would hold me responsible for that?"

"Indirectly—yes. Or to look nearer home, consider the case of Ireland."

"The example is not altogether well chosen," Saul Hartz spoke with a scorn he did not try to conceal. "If your precious Society will condescend to read our newspapers, it will see that we are committed to a policy of conciliation."

"Ireland and her affairs have long been a political cat's-paw for the Newspaper Ring, the secret power which sways the destinies of mankind."

"Cheap generalizations," said Saul Hartz, contemptuously.

"The Society does not share your view. By the light

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of what has happened since, it now sees that Ireland and her affairs were a card played with Luciferian skill to precipitate the world catastrophe. A master stroke of policy on the part of antichrist, no doubt. The scheme was crowned with every success. By the irony of fate, however, that catastrophe has made it possible to restore the moral law to the world."

"Of which your Society is the embodiment, I presume?"

"That is so," Lien Weng bowed gravely. "It is based entirely on the moral idea."

"In other words," said Saul Hartz, "it murders people of whom it doesn't approve from the highest motives. A scheme delightfully convenient, yet not altogether new."

"The Society makes no claim to novelty. It has existed in a rudimentary form in the Celestial Empire and throughout many Eastern lands for thousands of years. In the oldest of all existing civilizations it is the last resort of the weak against the strong. Those whose minds are developed on disparate lines from that implacable 'efficiency' which enables the brain of the modern western business man to dominate the physical world and make life a hell for those who arouse its predatory instincts, are now banded together in self-defense against the common enemy of the human race."

"Who and what is the common enemy of the human race?"

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"Those who contrive war. Those who preach war. Those who spread rumors of war. The Society has one aim, and one aim only. By every means in its power it ensues Peace."

"Even at the price of murder."

"Murder is a word, a phrase, determined by the man-made statutes of a ballot-box democracy, presided over by the occupant of the Woolsack whom a supine government failed to hang in the year 19—— Human nature does not vary in the matter of its law courts. The man who is hanged is never so finished a criminal as the man who hangs him. Murder, I repeat, is a word, a phrase. Peace is tangible, a possible ideal, a definite object. For many months now, to give one more instance of its activities, the Universal Press, of which you, sir, are the controlling spirit, owing allegiance to none, has been working in a hundred subterranean ways to embroil the United States with Great Britain. What it has to gain by these periodical rifts the stock exchanges of London and New York are best able to say. But the Universal Press, whose power is now manifest in every land of the habitable globe, may yet choose, if unable to surmount the Trust Law, that bulwark and defense of the plain American citizen, to involve the two nations in a fratricidal conflict, with unchallenged world-power a fitting crown for the victor. Antichrist would then be indeed enthroned."

The Colossus again expressed a contempt of such

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reasoning. "Evidently," he said in his husky whisper, "your precious Society has not condescended to read the article in yesterday's *Planet* which I myself dictated."

"Let me assure you, sir," said Lien Weng, "that it has done so and marked it carefully. But such admirable sentiments, of which your newspapers have an inexhaustible supply, is no more than dust for the eyes of fools. The Universal Press has taken for its motto the famous saying of our own Lao-tsze, the prophet of Taoism, 'Learn to throw dust in order to cast it.' Or in words which the western brain may find easier to understand, 'Learn to defile the wells of truth behind a curtain of poison gas.' "

"One has heard all this so often," said the Colossus, plaintively. "Can't you tell us something new?" And he yawned cavernously in the face of the others.

Lien Weng paid no regard to the interruption. He went quietly on, "Much of the political news the Universal Press transmits so diligently from America to England is willfully distorted; much of the political news it transmits from England to America is equally false."

"So you say," laughed the Colossus.

"Let us take one example. The report of the speech in Congress of Senator Larcom which you print on page 8 of yesterday's *Planet* is quite inaccurate."

"How do you know that?"

"Senator Larcom has already sent by cable his own

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version of his speech to a member of the Society. You may read it if you choose, and compare it with the garbled fragments which appear in the *Planet* newspaper and which the Universal Press has already flashed round the world. At this moment it is being read, assimilated, acted upon in Hong Kong, Calcutta, Sydney, Montreal and a hundred-and-one other centers of public opinion."

At a sign from Lien Weng, the cabled account from Washington was produced by George Hierons, the person to whom it was sent. It was laid on the table.

"Read," said Lien Weng.

"It doesn't interest me," said the Colossus. "Besides, it proves nothing. Mistakes of this kind are bound to arise."

"That may or may not be so," said Lien Weng. "But they occur far too often. And as far as Britain and the United States are concerned they always err upon one side. That is not the side of amity. Less than a month ago you put in the mouth of an eminent English politician a phrase he never used, and sowed it broadcast. Tardy denial followed, but a calculated lie had a clear start of seventy-two hours. Infinite damage has thereby been done to a growing reputation and to the cause we have at heart."

"What sort of a reputation is it, I ask you," said Saul Hartz, insolently, "that can suffer infinite damage because a single letter is omitted accidentally from a single word its owner uses?"

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"There lies your skill," a hoarse voice broke in. It was that of John Endor. With lustrous eyes and a face inhuman in its pallor he was following each word of the argument with intensity. "All of us here can only regard it as devilish."

"Yes—devilish," said Lien Weng, in his soft and gentle voice. "But even sheer wickedness sometimes overreaches itself. That simple act of omission, in the peculiar circumstances of the case, was vile. Yet already it has had a recoil. The Society of the Friends of Peace owes to that foul blow the presence here this evening of John Endor." The President bowed gravely to the politician. "He will prove a source of infinite strength to our counsels. We welcome such a man with open arms."

A look of disgust flashed from the eyes of Saul Hartz. "A man is not to be envied," he said, "who mixes himself up with a thing of this kind. If Mr. Endor is the man I take him to be," Hartz looked Endor steadily in the face, "he is going to regret very bitterly his association with you and your fellow anarchists and murderers."

"Time alone can prove," said Lien Weng impassively, "whether John Endor will have anything to regret in his whole-hearted devotion to the cause of peace. Meanwhile his presence here cannot fail to give weight to the deliberations of the Council of Seven."

"And if I may say so," interposed George Hierons,

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"authority to its acts. Without the help of John Endor and all that he stands for, the Society might not have been able to deal with the most inimical power of the modern world."

"You pay poor me far too high a compliment," said the Colossus with a down-looking smile. But all present knew, when they saw it, the pride which apes humility. "However, what does it matter?" With an air of resignation Saul Hartz folded his arms. "And you are getting tedious, aren't you? Why not cut the cackle and get to the hosses? Before you proceed to nick my throat, or knock me on the head, or dope my mineral water is there any little thing in which I can oblige you?"

"We are coming, sir, to that." The civilized politeness of Lien Weng was an odd contrast to Saul Hartz's ill-breeding. "On behalf of the Society I am about to place before you a formal proposition. It is this: The Society is prepared to buy your entire holding, including the Founder's shares, in the Universal Press."

"I shall be glad to learn your price."

"Within three months the Society is prepared to pay you the sum of two hundred millions sterling. But to this offer it attaches one condition. You will be required to give an undertaking never again to engage in any form whatever of journalistic enterprise. In other words, sir, you must give up the formidable, nay, terrible, machine you control, and you are expressly debarred from ever constructing another one like it."

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"And in the event of this offer being refused?" Saul Hartz asked.

For a moment there was silence. Lien Weng looked at the circle of tense faces. But it was the American who answered the question. As a preliminary he slowly removed a large cigar from the corner of his mouth.

"Pretty bad for the coo, sir," he said in a voice like a child's. "Take it from me."

"I expect so," was Saul Hartz's only comment.

Silence came again. The eight men smoked steadily.

Lien Weng it was who spoke at last. "We don't ask you to make up your mind here and now. You shall have eight weeks from to-morrow, Monday, in which to reach a decision."

"Eight weeks. Thank you," said the Colossus dryly. And he began to chew the end of his cigar.

"Think it over, my friend," said Hierons, in a cheerful and businesslike tone. "One thousand million dollars—paid down within three months. Think it over."

"I will." The Colossus knocked the ash from the end of his cigar. "I promise you that. And now perhaps you'll let me out of this mousetrap."

"For the time being, sir, the business is concluded." And Lien Weng returned the keys of the room to the Frenchman and the American who promptly unlocked the doors of the library.

XXVIII

WITHIN the space of the eight weeks granted by the Society of the Friends of Peace for Saul Hartz's decision, much was to happen to John Endor and to the inner world of politics in which he moved. Endor's own life was linked so closely with the energies of the time that the recoil of events affected it deeply. Many strange, many pregnant, things were about to happen.

John's first act on his return on the Monday to London from his rather nightmarish visit to Doe Hill was to communicate at once with Helen Sholto. He arranged that they should lunch together at a quiet restaurant in Soho.

Here, in privacy, with none to overhear and none to oversee, he unburdened his heart. He did not think well to let Helen know of the Society, much less of his own transactions with it: how in spite of some deep protesting instinct, he had been induced to take the oath of allegiance; how in the main he had yielded to the powerful arguments of their friend in common,

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George Hierons; and how, having taken the plunge with a full perception of all that it involved, he was ready to defend his action. For he now saw with a clearness greater than ever before, that the malign growth which was so rapidly eating its way to the core of the state must, no matter what the cost to the body politic, be at once cut out.

One thing, however, Endor decided to do. That was to tell Helen of the charge this man, Saul Hartz, had laid upon her good name. Such, indeed, was his real purpose in going to her at once. The impulse of his nature would not allow him a moment's rest until the woman he loved was rescued from the clutches of the monster of infamy whom she was loyally serving.

Without preface Endor told her what Saul Hartz had said.

"He says you are his mistress." As word by word her ear felt their whispered fall, the surge of emotion in his voice filled her with pain. Before the blow itself, however, not a nerve quivered. But her heart turned to ice.

"I felt like killing him. But these are not heroic days. Besides, such *canaille* are not worth it—if one has a work to do."

"Not worth it—no," she said at last, gently, and then, a woman: "Tell me, what led him, do you suppose, to say that?"

"Pure devilment. He knows you're leaving him, he understands your value, and to give you up to me, of

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all people, is for one of his nature a bath of vitriol."

"But it isn't like him," said Helen, "to indulge a mere spite. He is too big a man. There must have been a deeper, a subtler motive."

"What do you think it can be?"

"He must have reckoned on an outside chance of your believing what he said."

John's look of sheer incredulity gave her a sudden insight into those hidden depths of character she had yet to penetrate. This new knowledge brought a glow of light to her eyes.

"I think," he said, "as soon as you have lunched, you had better go to the telephone and tell them you are not returning to the Office. Here and now you must close this man down. You can never go back to Universe Building."

She did not answer at once. Seconds only were recorded by heart and brain, but when she spoke a weight of years had been added to her voice. "I think you are right," she said.

He could guess the wrench to such a practical mind as hers to part with her career, to give up with almost quixotic decision the greatest prize in her profession. But faced now with the necessity she did not hesitate. "I have saved very little," she said quite simply. "And I don't quite see how I am going to get work—certainly not immediately, if at all. The U. P. may be able to close every door. He says they can. However . . .

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no matter . . . there it is. I'll go and telephone to them now."

His own will had steeled hers for the task. So be it! Let the die be cast! But as he sat at the restaurant table, looking all the facts in the face, the oppression upon his heart was almost more than he could bear.

Storm clouds lowered on every hand, heavy with menace. The future was dark to the verge of the terrible.

As Helen returned, that virile figure, so strong, so sane, so alive with courage and capacity braced him for his own great throw.

"You've cut the painter?"

"Yes," she said in a low voice.

"Well now, my darling," he said with the odd tenderness which always made him so hard to resist, "we stand together or we fall. Let us get married at once with the least possible fuss."

She did not yield at once. Elementally she was very feminine. Besides, there were strong arguments to bring against unseemly haste. It would be a bitter blow to John's mother who had quite other views for her ewe lamb. And what, pray, had they to set up house-keeping upon, now that Helen had just cast away her princely thousand dollars a month?

John, however, had given thought to all that. The old lady, with Helen's consent, should stay on at Wyndham where things might remain exactly as they were

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for the rest of her days; and Helen and he could take a small house in London. At the start, it was true, the house in London would have to be a very modest affair. He had a few hundred a year of his own, plus a few hundred more as a member of parliament; but now that the U. P. had raised the fiery cross, that source of revenue would probably disappear at the next general election, which by all the portents could not be long delayed. When his mother died he would have Wyndham and her entire income, which, however, at the present time was barely sufficient to keep up an old and much depreciated property.

It would be foolish to shirk the fact that for the time being they would have to pare cheese. They would find themselves with their backs to the wall, with calumny and misrepresentation on every hand; but let them stand shoulder to shoulder, their colors nailed to the mast. No matter what happened they would go down fighting.

The light in his eyes decided Helen. She, too, belonged to a free people.

"Yes," she said, "we'll stand or fall together."

He grasped, in his boy's way, the hand of a good comrade. "We'll break the International Newspaper Ring, or it shall break us."

She was quite ready to buckle on his armor. "Government by newspaper must end—if civilization is to go on. One has always smiled at the notion that Saul Hartz can put in any government he chooses and turn

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it out if it doesn't please him, but in the last three weeks one's eyes have been opened to many things. And if the Breit Combine joins with the U. P. as you declare it will, my own country will be in the same plight."

"Yes," said John Endor, "now you really see the malignant growth that lies at the very root of the Anglo-Saxon world. There can be no hope of a stable peace while this king of all grafters is free to go on. Well, thank God, the eyes of some of us are open at last. I'll go down to the House this afternoon and air my voice if I get a chance."

"Do," she said. "All power to it. Meanwhile, I'll go and look for a little house. There are five hundred pounds in my stocking—did I tell you?—his money, alas!—but I hope honestly earned."

John took from his pocket a sheaf of notes written in pencil. Much new material had come to him in the course of the week-end at Doe Hill for the speech he was meditating in the House of Commons. "But don't let us deceive ourselves," he said. "They are not in the least likely to listen to a private member. Strong as this indictment is it will impress neither the Cabinet nor the rank and file. They are men of straw. The U. P. put them where they are and it can remove them to-morrow. At least, they believe it can. Shade of Gladstone and Bright! Shade of Burke and Pitt! that a newspaper trust should have them all in its pocket."

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As he got up from the table, his face, which still bore the marks of recent ill-usage, looked strained and curiously old. But any hint of weakness was effaced by the eyes which burnt with lustre and intensity.

XXIX

JOHN ENDOR went down to the House of Commons and made the speech of his life. Soon after five, when he rose to benches more than half empty, to demand a remedy against that ever-growing evil, the menace of the Newspaper Trust, many honorable members smiled. In a few brief years, the disintegration of the Mother of Parliaments was all but complete. This crowd of time-servers and adventurers, composed in the main of bagmen and trade-union officials were under no illusion as to the terms of their tenure. These hungry ravens knew better than to peck the gentle hand that fed them.

How often, besides, had they heard all this "gup." There was nothing new in it. And this man Endor was either an egotistical donkey or a purblind idiot not to be aware that he was merely butting his head against a stone wall. At the next general election, which might come at any time now, it would simply be a case of "Endor must go." And Endor would go. The Endors always did.

Didn't this triple-play ass know that every word he

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uttered was digging his own grave? Such passion, such irony, such precision, such cumulative force simply asked for the scrap heap. Dating from the middle of the late war, that thrice blessed upheaval! the scrap heap was where all the Endors had gone. Education, breeding, dedication, were back numbers at Westminster. The country's, the Empire's, government, thank God! was now in the hands of business men. "We believe in the U. P. and we are registered subscribers!" That was the open sesame, just that simple and modest oath of allegiance. It was as easy as swallowing butter.

Some of the honorable members dozed a little in the course of this crack-brained fellow's oratory, others retired to the refreshment room to get a cup of tea. And the few who listened to the strange words, so much out of place within those walls, two or perhaps three of the old hands, hardened æsthetes, not yet quite dead of fatty degeneration of the soul, could not restrain their minds from reverting to the days before the deluge. Bright! Gladstone! Asquith! Grey! Be it so. In the end, every country had the government it really wanted.

Just one there was, among those who deigned to hear John Endor who went even a step farther than these disloyal camp-followers of the U. P. On each side of this magnate on the Treasury Bench was an overdressed but underbred colleague—an ordinance sometimes resorted to by Divine Providence to restore

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the *aurea mediocritas*—for the magnate himself happened to be the prime minister.

There is no need, at any rate, in these pages, to decorate him with the pomp of capital letters. The prime minister of Britain was a supine and ignoble figure in the view of many. Wilberforce Williams by name, he was generally known as "Slippery Sam," because, as his fervent admirers claimed, "you never knew when you 'ad him."

Nobody knew exactly how, when or why Slippery Sam had made his way to his present eminence. Nobody cared. But there he was on the front bench with his boots cocked up on the table in front of him, master of all he surveyed, with a whole set of blank coupons, two books full, in his pocket. There he was and if possible there he meant to stay.

On principle the prime minister listened to John Endor. It may seem a little odd that such a man as Mr. Williams should have had a principle to indulge; certainly it was not at the call of mere duty or at the beck of truth that he now listened to this young man who took himself and his country so seriously. But Mr. Williams was a little intrigued by him, in the way he was a little intrigued by so many things. For, like other prime ministers before him, he was by way of being an amateur of the human comedy. Therefore, he knew the authentic note when he heard it.

Nobody, not even the Colossus himself, had penetrated to the fact that, in point of sheer cleverness,

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Slippery Sam was at that moment without a peer in the realm. Cleverness may not be a specially high attribute, and Mr. Williams, who was perfectly frank with himself, would have been the first to say so, but occasions do arise when it has its uses.

One of these now occurred. Midway through the speech of this rather simple but very gifted young man, there came the word China.

The prime minister, it seemed, had lately been paying a good deal of attention to China. His thoughts were in this wise. "In my pocketbook is the ukase that infernal fellow H. had the effrontery to hurl at me the other day in his own handwriting."

"Saint James's Square,

"Friday afternoon

"MY DEAR W. W.:

"Send the Fleet to Peking before Japan gets in, or forfeit all claim to thinking Imperially.

"Yours, in haste,

"S. H."

Mr. Williams' mind as it now reverted to China was a complex of many things. Listening to that name of ill omen on the lips of the member for Blackhampton, listening to the burning scorn of his words, the prime minister suddenly remembered the giants of his youth. Above all, he remembered Gladstone's power of carrying not only the House, but the country with him on a live issue.

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This young man Endor, out of date as he was, a rather tragic anachronism in that *cénacle* sprawling, dozing and sneering around him, was a voice from the past. He had not the ear of the House it was true. The simple fact was, the House no longer possessed an ear; it had no longer the power to react to style or tradition. Demosthenes himself could not have pierced these professional hardbakes, who ran the country on the lines of their trade-unions. The British House of Commons was now the most soulless and vulgar of all assemblies; the U. P. had castrated it; but the prime minister, at any rate, was still able to recognize the divine fire.

Moreover, the flame burning in the heart of this young man, John Endor, set him thinking.

XXX

THE thoughts of Slippery Sam were after this fashion.

"H. means war with China. And he has already said in my private ear, 'If you don't do my bidding I shall have you out and put in somebody who will.' Now I, Wilberforce Williams, who am quite frank with myself, though with nobody else, do not want war with China. It will be an unjust war. It will be an ill-timed war, because money is still pretty 'tight,' and war itself is still out of fashion. Moreover, it may lead ultimately—[Mr. Williams was a far-sighted man]—to trouble with Japan and possibly, I don't say probably, to war with the United States. Nor do I think this Chinese business can ever be popular. Hartz says his newspapers and his cinemas shall make it popular. Well, it is only too true, that in that line he can do anything . . . all the same . . . this may be . . . I don't say it is . . . the psychological moment for the much trodden worm to begin to turn.

"China might make a live issue to take to the country in the good old-fashioned way. A general election

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must come within three months. I've had the nous, thank God, to keep the old party machine in being. It needs overhauling and bringing up to date, but there is a certain amount of money in the party chest, and if I can get the right people in charge—alas, honest men are very shy of me!—it is just possible—don't let us put it higher—that W. W. may catch the Colossus napping."

Much beguiled was this venerable-looking, white-haired and ineffably cunning gentleman with the idea that was slowly coming to birth in his mind. No sooner had the member for Blackhampton sat down, which he did amid murmurs of ironical applause, after boring the House of Commons for a full hour, although posterity may be inclined to take a more lenient view of the performance, than the prime minister retired to his room. In that seclusion, he amused himself with a little quiet study of Whitaker. This young man, at the Stunt Election of 19—, although not taking quite so kindly to the Coupon as he might have done, had yet been returned for Blackhampton by a solid majority of four thousand odd.

"Well," ruminated the prime minister, "Blackhampton is the metropolis of the midland counties and in those parts they are a shrewd, hard-headed folk. They have a knack of going pretty straight to the root of most matters. And they appear to have a good opinion of John Endor. It might do no harm to have a little preliminary try-out at Blackhampton, to learn the thick-

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ness of the ice and to gauge the temperature of the country."

So grateful was the idea to the mind of Mr. Williams that as he went into the lobby in search of John Endor he smiled pleasantly at his thoughts. By a happy chance, almost the first man he met was the member for Blackhampton.

"My dear Mr. Endor,"—in the humane art of patting on the shoulder the younger generation Slippery Sam had no peer—"permit me, if I may—without impertinence—to congratulate you—to congratulate you most sincerely on a fine—a really fine—effort."

"Thank you, sir," said the member for Blackhampton. "It is very good of you." Naïf young man, he could not withhold a little blush of pleasure! There was such a genuine ring in this voice of fatherly benevolence. Besides, to John Endor, anachronism as he was, the prime minister of England still meant something.

"Don't let me be fulsome"—the well modulated voice of Mr. Williams could achieve real charm on these occasions—"but do you know whom you brought back to the mind of an old man? Mr. Gladstone. As I sat listening to you, my dear sir, I thought of the long ago—alas, how long ago it seemed!—when Mr. Gladstone brought in his Bill for Ireland. But, as I say, don't let me be fulsome."

John Endor was dumb before these praises.

"Your grandfather the Duke," the prime minister

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flowed smoothly on, "was a little before my day. But he was a great man. His speeches in Another Place on the People's Charter live in history. For a man of his time and class he was most enlightened. I am so glad for his sake that there is still among us one of his kin to bear the torch."

John Endor was still dumb, but now he glowed with happiness.

"I wonder, Mr. Endor, if you can dine with us tomorrow at Number 10, just my wife and me? Nobody else, except perhaps, my daughter. But quite informal—just *en famille*. Afterwards over a cigar, we'll have a little talk. Your fine speech . . . it's . . . well, tomorrow evening, at eight."

XXXI

AT eight o'clock the next evening, John Endor found himself in the prime minister's drawing-room, shaking hands with the prime minister's lady.

The celebrated "Mrs. Wilber" was a tall, rather austere dame, with the remains of considerable good looks; moreover, they conferred upon her an air of intellectual distinction to which she was hardly entitled. Mrs. Wilber, it is true, had an almost sublime power of putting her foot in it; but this faculty in a prime minister's lady may spring from one of two causes: she may have too many brains, or she may have too few. Slippery Sam's greatest enemies had never accused his wife of having too many.

By no means brilliant herself, Mrs. Wilber profoundly distrusted scintillation in others. Her husband she regarded as good rather than brilliant; indeed, in her attitude to her lord, she was almost a latter-day equivalent of Mrs. Gladstone. She seemed to regard the prime minister as too bright and good for human nature's daily food; in fact, a kind of composite of the librarian to the House of Lords and a certain

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highly distinguished personage in Heaven. To those best acquainted with the singularly complex character of the first minister of the Crown, this obsession of Mrs. Wilber's was a source of pure joy.

John Endor was too elemental to give overmuch thought to the Mrs. Wilbers of life. All the same, he had humor enough to appreciate his hostess' sovereign faculty of "putting her foot in it." Dinner had hardly begun when she was openly rebuked by a clever, charming, unconventional young daughter seated opposite Mr. Endor, for announcing "that it gave her so much pleasure to find that gentlemen were still to be found in politics."

"Really, mother!" Miss Clarice reproved her with the very latest Oxford inflection.

Mrs. Wilber shifted her ground a little, although maintaining the general position by asking after "dear Lady Elizabeth." She herself claimed to be of solid Middleshire county stock; indeed, one of her father's properties marched with Wyndham, and she was able to remember John's own father being acclaimed as one of the best men to hounds of his generation.

"And I hear you are going to be married, Mr. Endor."

Rather a blow this, to Miss Clarice, who brought her charming nose to the menu card before attacking a curry.

She bore up very well, in spite of the fact that she had already told herself privately that she would have

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to consider the question of marrying Mr. John Endor.

He was good to look at certainly, his low voice a delight, there was not a hint of stiffness or formality about him, and, crowning joy, he had a sense of humor.

"How exciting!" Only a very little curry was needed for Miss Clarice to effect a superb, if rather stoical, recovery. "Do tell me. Who is the lady?"

"Miss Helen Sholto of Virginia, my dear." Mrs Wilber had seen the announcement in the *Morning Post*, and had known how to cherish it in a manner becoming a prime minister's lady. "But tell me, Mr. Endor, what does dear Lady Elizabeth say?" In she went again, horse, foot, and artillery. "Virginia is in the south, I believe, which is not the *moneyed* part of America. But all Americans, of course, have money."

A look of blank despair settled upon Miss Clarice, who was inclined to see her mother, not in terms of Mrs. Gladstone, but in terms of Mrs. Dizzy.

John Endor enjoyed his dinner all the same and so did Miss Clarice. The talk was really quite amusing. Mr. Williams himself was a model host and no mean conversationalist. He went back a long way. Even in Victorian times he had been in the inner circle of society and politics. He had a fund of anecdote which no man living knew better how to employ. He was always geniality itself, and on occasions of modest festivity in the bosom of his family he was wholly delightful.

It was in the library, however, after dinner that John

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Endor really found himself at grips with Fate. Ushered into an armchair, strategically disposed so that the bust of Pitt should be on his right and a set of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* on his left, two adjuncts indispensable to the library of Number 10 Downing Street, and duly furnished with an excellent cigar, the neophyte settled himself to hear golden words.

In the delicate and judicious phrase of the prime minister, it seemed that one Bendish, an admirable man, was living now under the threat of Bright's disease, and that in the opinion of Mrs. Bendish, an admirable woman, only one place could hope to arrest the ravages of such a grave malady. That place was the House of Lords. Whether the air of the Gilded Chamber was more salubrious, whether its system of drainage was more modern, the central heating more efficient, the ventilation less inadequate, was one of those problems which the prime minister, having no first-hand knowledge of Another Place, did not offer to solve. But there the matter was. Mrs. Bendish, an admirable woman, was convinced that, for Bright's disease, the rarified atmosphere of the House of Lords was the only remedy. Alas, that Mr. Bendish should be smitten with so fell a malady!

The prime minister, however, was by no means averse from applying the antidote. Drastic, no doubt, but Mrs. Bendish, a Spartan wife, was adamant. Unhappily, Mr. Bendish would not be able to continue his signal work for the State. The Home Office and the

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House of Lords are not necessarily incompatible, but like Burgundy and port they are a combination not quite suited to all constitutions. Such at least, in this case, was the view of the prime minister. In the event of Mr. Bendish really going to the House of Lords—and Mrs. Bendish was so firm on the point that it hardly admitted of doubt—it would be expedient for his Britannic majesty to seek a new secretary of state for the Home Department. In a word, would Mr. Endor take that Office?

Mr. Endor was a little staggered. The bust of Pitt was on his right hand, a set of the Encyclopedia Britannica was on his left, none the less, the prime minister's point-blank offer was in the nature of a bolt from a blue sky.

"It will mean, I'm afraid, a by-election." The honeyed voice of Mr. Wilberforce Williams had the mellifluity that endeared him to every journalist in the land. "And—don't let us deceive ourselves—my dear sir—a stiff one. To be frank—to be perfectly frank—the member for Blackhampton will not be exactly *persona gratissima* in Universe Building."

To the young Lothair, that was the amazing part of the whole matter. He had no claim to subtlety of mind, but he was not a fool. What was in the wind? Well he knew that for the member for Blackhampton to be given the Home Office was tantamount to Slippery Sam throwing down the gage of battle to the U. P.

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"Take a little time for your answer, my dear sir." Such linked sweetness must have seemed a little excessive in any one not the prime minister. "Take twenty-four — forty-eight—yes, forty-eight hours—shall we say? In the meantime, may I rely—of course I may—such a superfluous question—on your absolute discretion?"

John Endor gave that unnecessary assurance.

"You see, my dear sir, do you not?"—the smile of Slippery Sam was deliciously vulpine. "As soon as they get wind of this in Universe Building, the Great General Staff will be in the field with a hundred fully mobilized army corps—before even our dear Mr. Bendish can apply for the Chiltern Hundreds."

XXXII

FORTY-EIGHT hours were indeed necessary for John Endor to make up his mind. A big decision confronted him. Even if he were given the Home Office on his own terms, and he had promptly decided that he would take it on no other, it was certain that, with the full weight of the U. P. against him, he would have a terrific fight to hold his seat. Moreover, if he managed to retain it, and faced with "the machine," the chances were that he would not, within a few months a general election was due, and he would have to fight again.

Brief study of the tactical position, combined with a little analysis of Slippery Sam's fair-seeming offer soon brought him perilously near the truth. A by-election in such a constituency as East Blackhampton would be a *ballon d'essai*, a try-out, a testing of the ice. The astute personage who dangled this lure of office would risk little. If a tyro, a comparative free lance, new to high places, failed to win East Blackhampton, he would be dropped like a hot coal. The

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rebuff would be accepted gracefully and an orthodox coupon-swallower, a "safe" man put up in his stead. Things would go on as they were; and the noble company of time-servers would trim their sails for the coming dissolution in the old happy way. But as Endor clearly saw, failure for him in such circumstances was likely to mean the end of his political career.

Was he justified in taking such a tremendous risk? He put the case squarely to Helen; it was but fair and right that he should do so. And she, at least, did not hesitate. Her faith in him was complete. Let him follow his star. The chance of his life had come. Let him show himself worthy of it.

His own instincts were knightly, but he could not rid his mind of a secret fear of Slippery Sam. How far would it be possible for John Endor to serve under the official banner of the most accomplished trimmer in the land? Finally, before deciding the matter one way or the other, he determined to see what terms he could make with this illustrious chieftain.

In effect his answer, when duly delivered to the prime minister was that he would accept the Office and run the gauntlet if, in the event of success, Mr. Williams would himself frame a bill to deal with the Newspaper Trust. Such a measure must be the first plank in the Government platform when he appealed to the country six months hence.

Somewhat to Mr. Endor's surprise, the prime minister agreed to this course. Great parliamentarian as

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Slippery Sam undoubtedly was, with an insight almost uncanny into the workings of the minds of his chosen instruments, he had anticipated the need for some such compact, before making the offer. Indeed, John Endor's demand came to him as a subtle reminder of his own prescience.

Mr. Williams was the last man in the world to take a leap in the dark. His plans were laid pretty deep. This picturesque young visionary, with his ancient name, his family tradition, his virile enthusiasm, was the one man in that House or out of it to sweep the whole country if the cause that nerved him were great enough.

In the considered opinion of Mr. Williams the cry *Break the Newspaper Trust and Bring Down the Price of Everything* was the only possible counter to the massed and entrenched forces of the enemy. At least it would rally the cruelly overburdened upper and middle classes; and conceivably it might woo sufficient of the "workers" from the spells of the U. P. to rout the Colossus with all his stunts and all his wiles.

At all events, Mr. Williams had now reached the conclusion that the yoke of Saul Hartz was intolerable. The question of China was the final straw that had broken the back of the camel. In his own good time he would try a fall with the U. P. Sooner or later it would have to be. His chains had grown unbearable. If he failed, rather than endure the ignominy of serving such a tyrant, he would retire from politics.

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If he succeeded, politics once again might offer a career for reasonably honest men.

In any event, nothing could have shown a more statesmanlike grasp of the amazingly complex conditions of the time than his choice of John Endor as the prophet of the new gospel—*Down with the U. P.*

XXXIII

BEFORE plunging into the fray at Blackhampton, Endor did a bold thing. He got married. A fortnight's grace was allowed him by the Government, before the issuing of the writs; and more than one consideration urged him to turn that precious interregnum to high account.

Wyndham itself was hardly more than ten miles from Blackhampton and this he made his headquarters for the fight. Having due regard to the circumstances of the case, John felt it would be wise to get through the business of being married with the least possible delay. Moreover, an impetuous nature urged him to this course. The opposition of his mother, conceal it as she might, he knew to be strong. It would be kinder to her, therefore, to rush the matrimonial fence. And he hoped that the old lady's mind would be distracted by the shock of events from dwelling too much on the affront to her wishes, the death of her hopes.

Again there was policy in this dispatch. Helen was going to be a great ally in the fight. An accomplished speaker, she thoroughly understood her own sex, and

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on the platform and in the press she had a way with her in her dealings with them. As the blushing bride of John Endor, an old and tried friend, now with his back to the wall, fighting for his political life, she would be in a position to steal a little of the enemy's thunder. "Aunt Mittie," "Lovely Lily Langrish," and their like, who had proved so formidable at other Stunt elections up and down the land, must look to their laurels. Romance of a more genuine kind might invest John Endor and his new and singularly attractive American wife. And if only "they could get the real goods over" with half the skill of the U. P. the fire of several big enemy batteries was likely to be dominated.

The wedding at the tiny church of the ancestral village was the simplest and quietest affair. No more than a handful of indispensables were there; just a few friends and relations who were bound to be present. George Hierons gave Helen away. This remarkable man was becoming very much the friend of both. He heartily approved Helen's severance from the *Planet* and Saul Hartz; moreover, he ventured upon the prophecy that Endor with such a wife would go far.

Lady Elizabeth, of course, was scandalized by the whole affair. Such a "nose-dive" into the holy state, such an absence of all trumpets and shawms, was worthy indeed of "Comrade" Endor. This undignified haste was nothing short of indecent; Lady Elizabeth had fully counted on "an engagement of at least

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two years." She felt, in fact, that she had every right to insist upon it. Still the old Die-hard supposed she must look at the bright side of the picture: this Miss Sholto, although an American, was not a person of color. She had no money, therefore John's infatuation for her was extremely reprehensible; at the same time, she seemed a shrewd, sensible, practical girl, and had the makings no doubt of an excellent wife. But if she was only a quarter as extravagant as the other American wives Lady Elizabeth had heard of, it would be quite impossible for them to keep up Wyndham. In the meantime, the old lady was a little appeased by John's announcement that they proposed to live in London in a very modest fashion, strictly in accordance with their own present income, and she would be left to carry on at Wyndham in the way she had always done.

The Blackhampton by-election might be an odd kind of honeymoon, yet John and Helen considered it to be an affair vastly more exhilarating than the regulation visit to an empty country house which ended invariably in boredom. At any rate, to John and Helen, there was nothing in the least boring about the Blackhampton election.

To begin with, they recognized from the outset how much was at stake. Then, too, Blackhampton itself, a live place, with three hundred thousand particularly live people in it, was by no means addicted to boredom. For these the world was far too full of a number of

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things interesting for that form of poison to be allowed to enter.

The member for *Blackhampton East* was to find moreover, when in person he came to open the campaign, that he had not entered the lists a moment too soon. The enemy was in the field already. It was never the way of the U. P.—for the sake of clearness and brevity, the foe may be incorporated in that comprehensive title—to let the grass grow beneath its feet. As Mr. Wilberforce Williams had himself predicted, within twenty-four hours of the Government showing its hand, the Great General Staff of Cosmos Alley and Universe Lane was ready to the last gaiter button.

East Blackhampton itself had for some little time past been on a war basis. Several months ago had come the order “from above” that at the next election ENDOR MUST GO. Everything was in review order for “the day.” So declared the U. P. agent-in-chief, at any rate. For many moons the constituency had been sedulously nursed by one of the regulation Colonial “bagmen,” Sir Stuyvescent Milgrim K. B. E. by name, a distinguished member of a famous army which had won the war without going near it.

When Mr. Endor at last came on to the scene, a little belatedly as it seemed to his own election agent, Mr. Ambrose Furley, he was received by that gentleman at the Central Committee Rooms. These were situated in Market Square, almost under the shadow of the noble statue of John Bright, by G. F. Watts.

XXXIV

THE Home Secretary-elect found his chief supporters heavily cast down.

"They've got a long start of us, already, Mr. Endor, and let me tell you, sir, they are out for blood." Such was the greeting of Mr. Ambrose Furley, a tall, thin gentleman, not by nature an optimist, who wore, as became the fine flower of Blackhampton's intelligentsia the black cord of his gold-rimmed eyeglasses round a red left ear. "And if I may be so bold as to offer an opinion, there's only one thing can save us from getting it fairly in the neck."

The member for East Blackhampton was not unused to the somber half-tones of his agent's mind, but he did not look for such out-and-out pessimism, even in Mr. Ambrose Furley.

"You see, sir," continued Mr. Furley, "from what I hear, the U. P. has made up its mind to do you in, no matter what it costs them."

John Endor, unshaken, smiled the smile of the happy warrior.

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The pessimism of Mr. Ambrose Furley grew a shade less defiant. "However, you may have a dog's chance, Mr. Endor, and that's about all. But take it from me, sir, even that chance depends, as you might say, on one contingency."

"So you think we may still venture to hope?" There was a light in the eye of John Endor.

"I don't put it as high as a hope, sir." In his use of the English language Mr. Furley liked to be precise. "A shadow of a hope is more like it. And as I have already said even that depends upon one contingency."

With the urbanity that all the Member's supporters so greatly admired, Mr. Endor waited patiently while Mr. Ambrose Furley in his own good time proceeded to show what "the contingency" was. "It's like this, do you see, sir? We mustn't be blind to the fact that we are up against a ticklish situation. The voting in this election is going to be very cross. Now that you've come out so strong, much too strong most of us think here, against the U. P. there's bound to be a big turn-over of votes, unless we can get one man to come down on the right side of the fence. It's just on the cards, if the gentleman in question does that, that we may not be beaten to a frazzle. But I don't say he will. At the moment he's seated on it. By nature he's a blue, a regular blue—but there's just a chance that, by a bit of management, he may come over to us. And

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if he does—well, sir, as I say, the voting at this election will be very cross.”

At this point the Member ventured tactfully to ask the name of the unknown power.

“Sir Josiah Munt,” said Mr. Furley, impressively. “Blackhampton’s Big Noise. In fact, sir,” Mr. Furley became almost lyrical, “Blackhampton’s Grand Old Man.”

“You think there’s a chance of Sir Josiah coming over?” The Member, for all his air of detachment, knew far more about local politics than appeared on the surface. “By Jove, that would be one up to us.”

“You bet it would, Mr. Endor. Sir Josiah is not everybody’s pretty boy, but he carries weight in this city. He’s a very honest man and he’s dead against ‘graft.’ It seems to me, sir, strictly between ourselves”—Mr. Ambrose Furley had all the shrewd penetration of a true Blackhamptonian—“that the U. P. is playing things up so high that there’s a poss-i-bil-ity, so far as Sir Munt is concerned, that it may overreach itself if it doesn’t watch it.”

“Good news if it is so. Can you suggest a means, Mr. Furley, of taking advantage of the fact?”

“Well sir, let us get down to brass tacks. Sir Munt is a bit of a One. He can’t be hustled. He can’t be driven. But he can see as far through a brick wall as most people. And last evening, as he was leaving the Floral Hall after the Sacred Harmonic Society’s annual performance of the Golden Legend in the com-

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pany of Alderman Kearsley, another old-fashioned blue, he was overheard to remark, 'I'm sorry to say it, Kearsley, but I'm afraid there's going to be awful graft at this election.' "

The Member agreed.

"Coming from a gentleman in Sir Munt's position those words mean a great deal. He knows very well that the graft is on his own side. The U. P. is so slick nowadays that it is beginning to give the Old Man cold feet. There's such a thing as being too clever in this world, Mr. Endor, and strictly between you and me, sir, the over cleverness of the other side is the only chance we've got."

At this point Mr. Ambrose Furley paused dramatically to readjust the cord of his eyeglasses round his left ear. It was an infallible sign on his part of constructive thought. "Do you know, sir," he said after a long moment of silence, "what I should do if I were you? It may be a little *infra dignitatem*, but I should take the earliest opportunity of stepping across the Market Place to the Mayor's Parlor and having a little heart-to-heart talk with Sir Munt. It may be *infra dignitatem*, as I say, but if you put the case against the U. P. only half as well as you put it in Parliament the other day, you'll lose nothing by it. Sir Munt is a patriot, an imperialist, a protectionist, and all that, but when it comes to a showdown he's a man who knows how many beans make five."

The Agent's argument found prompt favor in the

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sight of John Endor. It came to him, in fact, rather in the light of an inspiration. A shrewd race these Blackhamptonians! There and then he decided to have an interview with the famous and admired Sir Josiah Munt.

XXXV

"SIR MUNT," for the nth time Mayor of Blackhampton,* was in his parlor at the City Hall, gazing into the heavens. A contraption rather like a monstrous aluminum fish shining in the October air hung above Market Square. At regular intervals of a minute or so there came fluttering down from the huge object in the sky a rain of leaflets. These varied in color and they fell upon the heads of the citizens.

At last, yet not without effort of will, Sir Munt set a term to his entrancement. He went across to his writing table and pressed the bell once. A small imp in a very tight suit of buttons promptly answered the summons.

"Niblo," said the Chief Magistrate, "step into the square and collect some of that dé-bris. Bring one of each color, my boy."

Preternaturally sharp in all circumstances, Niblo fully understood what was required. He made his exit with a duck.

Sir Munt turned thoughtfully to the room's second occupant. Its second occupant was no less a personage than his stenographer, Miss Evans. An intelligent,

* See *The Undeafated*.

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demure, stylishly attractive young lady, she was seated before a typewriter carefully transcribing from her private notes a sheaf of letters recently dictated to her by the Mayor.

"Miss Evans," said his worship, "if you've written that letter to Sir Stuyvescent Milgrim let me see it."

The letter duly detached from the growing pile was handed to the Mayor, who looked every inch of him—and they were many—the City's Chief Magistrate, as he put on a pair of eyeglasses to peruse it. For several minutes he studied the letter in silence with the frown of a man who did not quite know his own mind. At last, the study was terminated and the frown increased by the return of Niblo, who with a fine air of importance bore a number of pamphlets, some of which were white, some of which were red, some of which were blue.

Sir Munt read the white one first:

LOVELY MATLOCK, THE INCOMPARABLE METROPOLIS OF THE PEAK DISTRICT OF DERBYSHIRE

A select number of subscribers to the UNIVERSAL PRESS will be transmitted daily to this enchanted spot, free of all charge, by AUNT MITTIE NUMBER THREE (Chicago World's Fair Model).

For full particulars apply to

GEORGE BUTTERS, Esq.,
Chief U. P. Agent,
King's Parade.

ENDOR MUST GO

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So much for the first announcement. The second, on blue paper, was as follows:

BLACKHAMPTON EMPIRE

(Twice Nightly)

On Monday next, and throughout the week, the world-famous COLORADO QUARTET will present a new song and glee entitled "ENDOR MUST GO." Words by the Poet Laureate. Music by Sir Topman Murtle, O.M., Mus. Doc. (Copies of this beautiful work half price to all subscribers to the U. P.) Logan's Elephants. Parajinsky Troupe of Priceless Bounders. Kuhlmann's Performing Seals, and a host of other attractions, including The World in Pictures on the U. P. Bioscope showing the recent riot at Hellington when the Member for East Blackhampton (Mr. John Endor, M.P.) was severely handled. Prices as usual. Special terms for subscribers to the U. P.

The third announcement, on red paper, ran thus:

KINEMA HALL

The most exquisitely appointed Picture Palace in the Midland Counties is now showing LOVELY LILY LANGRISH (England's Own) in her great three-reel exclusive "THE BRIDE OF PRINCE CHARMING." Also East Blackhampton Election Scenes. Arrival of Sir Stuyvescent Milgrim at Central Station. Enthusiastic Reception. Floral tribute from Members of the U. P., etc., etc. Also vivid two-reeler of the Recent Riot at Hellington. John Endor, M.P., nearly loses his life. Thrilling escape by back door from a mob of Infuriated Workers, etc., etc. Also a first release of the latest triumph of U. P. cinematography. Saul Hartz, Esq., O.M., the great philanthropist, in the robes of an Honorary Curator of Blackpool Observatory, praying with the Chief Druid at the Welsh Eisteddfod. A print in five colors, suitable for the home, based on this subject, after the famous work by Albert Blantyre, A.R.A. (awarded Gold Medallion at Chicago World's Fair) may be had on application free of charge by all *bona fide* subscribers to the U. P.

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Sir Munt's only comment on these exhibits was a slight pursing of the lips. But his countenance, at all times a little heavy, grew decidedly dour. Moreover, he ruminated exceedingly.

He was still deeply involved in the process of thought, when he was interrupted by a fierce and sudden ring of the telephone bell.

"Yes! Yes!" said Miss Evans, receiver in hand. A moment later the Mayor was informed that Mr. Endor, M. P., sent his compliments, and could Sir Josiah make it convenient to see him at once if he came over from his committee rooms at the other side of the Square.

Sir Josiah pondered the matter for a long and serious moment. And then he said weightily: "Tell Mr. Endor I'll see him now if he cares to nip across."

XXXVI

JOHN ENDOR'S talk with Sir Munt gave that gentleman much food for thought. For twenty-five years the Mayor of Blackhampton had voted Blue. In the purview of Yellow, its arch and traditional foe, Blue was the badge of Reaction, of Capitalism, of Imperialism, of Mass-oppression. Yellow, in the opinion of Blue, was the badge of Ca' Canny, Democratic Insolence, Class Prejudice, Mob Rule. Once upon a time, no doubt, the two colors may have approximated more or less to these extremes.

Since the Great War, however, and the rise to power of the Newspaper Ring, things had changed. In fact they were always changing. At the beck of Cosmos Alley and Universe Lane, these two primary colors were now interchangeable terms. Blue became Yellow, and Yellow became Blue in deference to the will of the magician who presided over the destinies of the U. P. In fact the art of government by newspaper had been raised to such a pitch that it took a very shrewd head to know who and what it was voting for. Sir Munt had a head of that kind, but more than once of late

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years in matters political its owner had been completely at fault.

At the last General Election, some six years ago, the U. P.—profanely called the Stunt Press—had declared for John Endor, then a tyro and greenhorn new to political life under modern conditions. He had been returned to parliament in consequence by a big majority. This time, however, the boot was on the other leg. "Endor must go."

The member for Blackhampton East had much to say to Sir Munt, and he said it cogently. The two men were singularly unlike. Endor, a highly civilized man of liberal ideas, was consumed with a desire to leave the world a little better than he found it. Sir Josiah, on the other hand, had not been born to social advantages. Entirely self-educated he had made his way by mother wit and force of will; but like so many of his kind, to whom life had brought prosperity, he too, had a regard for the body politic. In Sir Munt the vein of idealism which ennobled John Endor was conspicuously lacking. He had seen too much of the ugly side of life to have any great hopes of human nature. All the same he was a good citizen and a very honest man. Rough he might be, on the surface, but his hand was often in his pocket; and he grudged neither time nor trouble in grappling with the eternal problem of the Under Dog.

"You tell me, Mr. Endor," said Sir Munt, looking at his visitor in what he would have himself described as "an old-fashioned way," "you tell me, sir, that the

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Stunt Press has behind it a ring of capitalists, with one man at its head, who is determined to become the dictator of this country."

"I do," said John Endor.

"Well, now," said Blackhampton's Chief Magistrate, "I don't believe that to be possible. One man—I don't care how clever—can't run a country like this."

"Saul Hartz steadily keeps that end in view. And his Trust is now organized in such a wonderful way that in the near future anything may happen. You see the Machine, as one may call it, of which this man Hartz is the linchpin has now a finger in every pie. A child can hardly buy a packet of pins without its permission. Its great opportunity came with the famine in paper and the world shortage in raw materials, which Saul Hartz was able to foresee. No one questions his power of looking ahead although he has paid a long price for it to the Devil. It has enabled him to corner, among other essential commodities, the inadequate supplies of news print. And when some years ago the crisis arose in the newspaper world, the entire British press had to make its choice—each individual journal, no matter what its traditions, must either enter the Ring on Saul Hartz's terms or close down. The best of them preferred to close down. One or two carried on and still do so with the help of private backers. But they are no more than voices crying in the wilderness and I am assured, by those who know, that in every case they are heavy losers financially. To begin with,

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you see, running a newspaper is no longer a business proposition for anybody."

Sir Josiah agreed. "For some time past I have been given to understand that the cost of paper and printing is prohibitive. Tatlow has to charge fourpence a day for the *Blackhampton Monitor*."

"That's because the *Monitor* is outside the Ring."

"Quite so. And it's about a quarter as good as the *Blackhampton Mercury* which charges three halfpence."

"The explanation is simple. One has pages upon pages of advertising matter; the other has none."

"Yes, of course."

"There you have the key of the position. Advertisements are the life blood of the Press. The Ring says to every advertising agent in the country: 'Advertise in any paper in the British Empire outside those controlled by us, and we refuse you all publicity.' Just think what that means to any business community. And you must please bear in mind that the U. P. has not only corralled all the chief newspapers and the raw materials that create them, but also a fleet of airships to distribute its products. Moreover, the Transatlantic telephone, which has hardly been completed a year is now in the hands of Saul Hartz."

Sir Munt sat up in his chair.

"By gum!" he said. "You don't say!"

"Painfully true, I'm afraid. He has outwitted everybody including our own Government and that of the United States. During the last few months, events

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have been tending very rapidly towards the enslavement of the whole world. People don't realize what this inner ring of newspaper Bosses with Saul Hartz at its head can do."

"What is the Government about?"

"The Government is powerless. At least it chooses to be. For one must never forget that it is composed exclusively of nominees of the U. P."

Sir Munt began to look worried. Ardent patriot and shrewd man of affairs, above all he was a man of business. The words of John Endor might sound alarmist, but the Mayor of Blackhampton knew there was a good deal behind them.

"Mr. Endor, if what you say's correct, it's high time some of us were up and doing."

"I agree; but it may be too late. Hartz is now working night and day to get a 'cinch' on America."

"That won't be easy."

"Easier perhaps than one may suppose. In the mass the Americans are just as gullible as ourselves. Hartz has been throwing dust in their eyes for years. The U. P. propaganda is always working on them as it is on us. Even now the average Briton is not alive to the menace of the whole country being run by one colossal trust. Give the American his due he has always kept that contingency in mind. Years ago he passed laws to prevent it. But the time is at hand when our friends across the water will have to look out, or Saul Hartz will be one too many for them. He has

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already got his foot well in. For some time now he has had a working arrangement with the Breit Combine, and if that mighty concern amalgamates with the U. P., as I'm assured it will, nothing on the face of this planet will be able to stand up against the power of antichrist."

"Antichrist!"

"The shallow materialism of the western business brain, of which the man Saul Hartz is the prophet, is nothing less than that. Genius of a kind he has, no doubt, but he lacks the essential faculty, like others before him, of knowing when to stop. He sees World Power in front of him, and under present conditions he may be allowed to grasp it on terms easier than would have been exacted of Napoleon I and Wilhelm II."

John Endor had many questions to answer in the course of a long interview, but in the end he was able to convince Sir Josiah Munt that the Newspaper Ring was the writing on the wall not merely for Great Britain, not merely for America, but for civilization itself. The instance from his own experience the member for Blackhampton East was able to adduce of the U. P.'s power of manipulating news, and the worth of the news when it had been manipulated, proved a clinching argument for that honest citizen.

"I must be up and doing." That was the thought in the mind of Sir Munt as he shook hands with his visitor and ushered him to the door. So powerfully

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had the case against the Ring been urged by one whom the Mayor instinctively respected, that he felt already for once in his life the stern necessity of voting Yellow. Native caution prevented his letting the candidate know just what was in his mind; but as John Endor recrossed the Market Square to his committee rooms he was upheld by a feeling that he had gone some way towards getting a strong man on his side.

Well it was to have this food for the spirit. The fight, envenomed already by a felon stroke, was bound to be severe. And the odds now massed against him were so heavy that a nature less warlike might have been overwhelmed.

XXXVII

AS the Mayor of Blackhampton watched from his window at the City Hall the tall and striking form of John Endor merge itself in the welter of citizens below in Market Square, he knew that he was faced by a momentous issue. The case against the Government and the U. P., that unholy alliance which had caused such widespread misery in the land and which now was threatening once more the peace of the world, had been urged with a force that had given the good man a shock. A key was now his to many disconcerting events of recent years, and he could but marvel that long before this he had not had the wit to discern the truth for himself. The shameful graft of the new bureaucracy for which Government by Newspaper had much to answer, he now saw from his own experience, to be sapping the life and liberties of the State.

More than once of late at the Imperial Club, whose imposing freestone facade stared at him from the other side of the Square, had Sir Munt during the luncheon hour heard despondent business men declare "that what

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the country really wanted to put things right was another war." During the late upheaval, whose scars had now begun to fade, all classes of the community had shared in a delusive prosperity; but only the few who controlled the means of production and their nominees in Whitehall and Westminster had been permanently enriched. The price of everything had been forced up, yet the value of everything had gone down.

When Sir Munt entered the Club dining room at a quarter past one as usual, he found it a hive. And it was a hive seething with excitement. Political feeling ran high. This by-election, having regard to all the circumstances, promised to be quite one of the most piquant of modern times. John Endor whom the U. P. had returned by a solid majority of four thousand at the last election, having bitten the hand that fostered him, was now going ignominiously to be "fired."

"Serve him right!" The opinion of the Club dining room was almost unanimous. But that which none of these pundits could understand even now was why in Wonder's name had Slippery Sam offered John Endor the Home Secretaryship? On the face of it such a move was an open and palpable affront to the U. P. In the light of that circumstance only one explanation was feasible. The prime minister was riding for a fall.

Even the most advanced thinkers at the Club luncheon table hesitated to accept that view. Slippery Sam was the wildest of men; yet those who were ready to

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make every concession to his peculiar talent were quite unable to read the riddle. If Endor was unseated, Mr. Williams would have to appeal to the country. And what would happen then?

No, the pundits declared themselves beaten. It was left, however, to the shrewdest and weightiest of them all to cast a ray of light upon the darkness. Sir Munt, armed with the new and rather amazing knowledge that had come to him less than an hour ago, proceeded to electrify the table at the head of which he sat.

"Comes to this, Murrell, my boy." Poising an oyster on an authoritative fork Sir Munt turned augustly to Alderman Murrell, the eminent Imperialist on his right. "Do we want another war or don't we? That's what it comes to."

A pause followed. And then, Sir Munt having enforced the appeal to Alderman Murrell's judgment by demonstratively swallowing the oyster, the eminent imperialist gave a cock of the head and said: "Well, Sir Munt, since you ask me I say 'Yes' and I say 'No.'"

"You can't ride both horses, my boy." Sir Munt poised oyster the second. "You've got to make up your mind to one on 'em. If you want war you'll vote for this little Colonial Snot."—Sensation!—"If you don't want war you'll vote for John Endor."

A pin might have been heard to fall on the Club mahogany.

"The time has come, Murrell, when some on us in this City has got to do a bit o' clear thinkin'. But be-

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fore we can do anything we must have the dust out of our eyes. What is the Universal Press up to?—that's the first question to ask ourselves. For years it has been preaching Disarmament in one column and quoting Rudyard Kipling in the next. You may be very bright and clever and quite well up in your business, but oil and vitriol don't always mix. Seems to me, Murrell, it's time we came to brass tacks."

Alderman Murrell and his fellow Imperialists sat up now and took notice. They had always been proud to think that Sir Munt whose force of will and breadth of view they deeply admired was one of themselves. He was very much one of themselves in point of fact. Was he not a trustee of the Club and permanent chairman of its house committee? For him to break loose in this unprecedented manner was indeed significant.

"I've just been having a heart-to-heart talk with Mr. Endor." A swift exchange of glances between the sconce-bearers of Sir Munt confirmed them in the view that he undoubtedly had. "He says the long and short o' the matter is, the U. P. is trying to force the Government into a war with China."

Sensation!

"The prime minister is against it, but the Cabinet is in such fear of what the U. P. can do at the next General Election that it means to force his hand."

"What can the U. P. do at the next General Election?" inquired a mild voice on the left.

"Most people think," said Sir Munt, "that the U. P.

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can put out the present government as easily as it put it in."

"But why should Saul Hartz want a war with China?" persisted the mild voice.

"Labor is getting out of hand. And he thinks it may do good all round—buck up trade, keep up prices, get the country and the colonies to pull together, and so on."

"There may be something in it."

"I don't think so, Jennings," said Sir Munt. "We've got to look ahead. If we get monkeying with China, the next thing on the tapis—so says Mr. Endor, and he sees as far through a brick wall as most, does that jockey—will be trouble between America and Japan."

"Is that going to matter?" inquired a second Imperialist.

"We can't afford to let Japan go under," said Sir Munt sternly. "Our commitments in that quarter are too deep."

"A thousand pities, it seems to me," interposed the slow dry voice of the manager of the National Bank, "that America ever jacked up the League of Nations. Seems to me that the world missed one of the opportunities that can never recur."

"Mr. Thorp, I'm with you there." Sir Munt sighed heavily. "And she's thought so, too, more than once, I'll bet a dollar. However, there it is. And here's the situation we've got to look at now. Every vote given for the Colonial gentleman is a vote for the U. P.

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And to-day, says Mr. Endor, and I for one can believe him, the U. P. means war with China. And to-morrow it may mean war with somebody of more importance than China."

"Serve 'em right."

The ill-timed remark from the other end of the table was drowned in a chorus of stern dissent. Even to these ardent minds such a contingency was not to be thought of. But on one point the great man at the table head was emphatic. Until the U. P. was brought under control there could be no security for any nation, any body of persons, any private individual. And the moment being opportune, Sir Munt clinched his argument with the story of the recent singular occurrence in that city. Several of those who heard it, although not among the admirers of John Endor—his views were much too "woolly" for thoroughgoing Imperialists—had been present at the famous luncheon. These now bore reluctant witness to the fact that he had been misreported. Not that it particularly mattered. Speechifying didn't cut much ice in these times. And it was reasonable to allow every orator a certain amount of latitude at a champagne luncheon.

"All very well," growled Sir Munt. "But that speech has gone round the world. His friends here, knowing the man and knowing the circumstances in which the speech was made, are content to believe that some one has blundered. I don't put it higher than that. But

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at Hellington the next day he got a broken head instead of a hearing."

Honest Sir Munt, having made his point, subsided now in a brief period of deglutition.

A few minutes later, in a favorite corner of the smoking room, he had a little serious talk with Alderman Murrell.

"I don't like voting Yellow," the Imperialist confided in a rather perplexed voice. "Somehow it goes against the grain, as it did against that of my father before me, but if Mr. Endor can satisfy us that he is not in favor of playing tricks with the Navy and the two-power standard will be maintained, I'm not sure it isn't my duty on this occasion"—even in the sanctity of the Club precincts the worthy alderman could not resist a rhetorical flourish—"on this occasion to record my vote for the Clean, the Decent, the Aboveboard."

Sir Munt looked in quite "an old-fashioned way" at his friend. "You must be careful, Murrell, my boy,"—the grin of the great man was almost saturnine—"you must be vur-ry careful how you interfere wi' the liberties o' the Press."

XXXVIII

WHEN, at a quarter to three, the Mayor left the Club, he linked his arm in that of Alderman Murrell, whose famous shop stood cheek by jowl with the City Hall at the other side of Market Square. As they came slowly down the steps, both gentlemen had a sense not merely of having lunched, but also of having done ample justice to the affairs of the nation. But amid the press of sharp realities into which they slowly projected themselves, they were soon aware that the affairs of the nation were still in the foreground of the picture. Above Market Square a monstrous airship still hovered, on whose Gargantuan belly the magic letters U. P. were clearly visible. And at that moment, dashing across the great Square itself, was a familiar mustard-colored contraption, with the legend "First with the News as Usual" flaring above it. The news was heralded by a large placard hung at the tail of the machine. "Aunt Mittie to address Charwoman's Conference" was its cryptic nature.

To the initiate, however, the "news" was not without significance. And Sir Munt and the worthy Alderman

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were themselves at the brink of enlightenment. As slowly and with a touch of pomp they descended the Club steps, for the awed eyes of ordinary workaday citizens were upon them, a shower of small white leaflets fell from the sky. It was a part and only a trivial part of the U. P. propaganda but the general effect was remarkably like a stage snowstorm. Indeed, Sir Munt emitted a quiet "very pretty" as he stooped augustly to retrieve one of these handbills which had fluttered and rotated to its long home at the bottom of the Club steps.

Sir Munt always liked to speak of himself as a *practical* man. Therefore, with an air of supreme nonchalance, the chief magistrate paused amid the citizens to adjust his eyeglasses.

The handbill gave the following information :

TORCHLIGHT PROCESSION OF THE CHARWOMEN OF ENGLAND !!!

To-morrow (Thursday) Evening the Delegates to the Charwomen's Conference will march to the Statue of John Bright in the Great Market Square to demand a Compulsory Pint of U. P. Stout with the mid-day meal.

The Right Honorable Sir Augustus Bimley, K.C.M.G., P.C., Britain's First and Still the Best Bookmaker M.P. will assume the Plinth at nine o'clock precisely (weather permitting).

After the Right Reverend the Lord Bishop of Blackhampton has offered a short prayer,

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Dame Agnita Shrubsole, D.B.E. ("Aunt Mittie") will address the gathering.

N. B. ENDOR MUST GO

"Very pretty!" Again Sir Munt paid involuntary tribute. "Very nice, indeed!" He handed the leaflet to his friend. "What do you think on it, Murrell?"

The Alderman adjusted a pair of gold-rimmed eyeglasses, a replica of the Mayor's, and read the document with care.

"Charwomen don't cut much ice, anyway," was the comment of Alderman Murrell.

The further-seeing man of affairs took him up sharply. "Don't make any mistake, my boy. Charwomen have all got a vote these days, the same as you and me. That's where the fun comes in. Aunt Mittie's *Own Journal* sells its millions of copies a week. And if you subscribe to it, you get reductions on everything from a nightgown edged with Honiton lace to a bottle of lime juice cordial. You can also ballot for free tickets to the movies, the Christmas Goose Club and the U. P. Burial Society. I tell you, my boy, you get your money's worth with Aunt Mittie's *Own Journal*."

"How they do it for twopence a week—that's what gets me!" The mind of the linendraper Imperialist moved in a rather narrow orbit.

"They don't do it—not on the paper. But what they lose on the swings, they get back on the round-

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abouts. And don't forget this, Murrell, if it comes to a showdown the U. P. can afford to lose on the swings *and* on the roundabouts, because the cocoanuts, my boy, will get them home every time. And why, Murrell?" A touch of forensic passion had begun to work in the veins of Blackhampton's first citizen. "Because Mugs like you and me are the cocoanuts. We are being milked dry, my boy—we, the Middle Classes, the folk who have a bit to lose and haven't learnt to defend it. The Charwomen's Conference is up-to-date Communism, my boy, with a certain newspaper Boss behind it all. He and his Ring, who have corralled the country's power, are keeping the workers quiet by showing them how to dip their hands in the pockets of you and me."

XXXIX

THE news ran like wildfire through Imperialist circles of the City that Sir Munt had "ratted." Moreover, the influence of a particularly honest and forcible man was such that he threatened to carry with him some of the acknowledged stays of his party. A situation at once arose that was a fitting prelude to the most significant by-election within living memory.

No matter what the moral defects of the prime minister might be, he was a very old and sure hand at the parliament game. His choice of John Endor to throw down the gage of battle to the U. P. was almost inspired. It might thunder up and down the land, but there was no disguising that a prophet had arisen to fight the cause of the oppressed Middle Class. John Endor made a fine champion for the small trader, the struggling professional man, and the people whose moderate, fixed incomes were being taxed out of existence.

The U. P. did not take long to realize the danger of its guns being spiked. Its batteries might thunder un-

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ceasingly, the real issues might be obscured in a cloud of poison gas, all its black arts might be called into play, but from the start there was no burking the fact that for once the Newspaper Ring was not going to have a walk-over.

To begin with, it was soon apparent that Cosmos Alley had shown less than its usual acumen in choosing a candidate. At the first blush, Sir Stuyvescent Milgrim, with his protection for key industries, preferential tariffs within the Empire and other shining lures for a purely mercantile community was "the sure card." But, as John Endor's first meeting proved, the U. P. champion was not well adapted to withstand the fire of criticism that was suddenly directed upon him from an unexpected quarter.

To the surprise of every politician in the City, the chair at Mr. Endor's first meeting was occupied by Blackhampton's Big Noise. For years Sir Josiah Munt had held a unique position in its public life. He was the friend of every good cause. If money had to be raised for a worthy object, a piece of legislation demanded, or a wrong denounced it was "as sure as Monday morning" that Sir Munt in his own characteristic fashion would sit at a small table with a tiny hammer in his hand in the center of the platform of the City's largest public hall. Moreover, he would bring the occasion home in a few words peculiarly his own. In the art of "putting it over" he had locally no equal. Disdaining mere grammar, verbal finesse, mi-

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nor niceties of form, at all times he knew how to speak man to man to the citizens.

At the Chairman's table, Sir Munt was a formidable proposition. He was very much a master man. And from the outset of the fight for Blackhampton East, the friends of Sir Stuyvescent Milgrim had to keep the fact ever before them.

"Seems to some on us, gentlemen," said Sir Munt, in the course of his opening remarks, at Mr. Endor's first meeting, "that our Colonial friend with the old Yorkshire name, who is so keen to help us over here, might do almost as well in Ottawa, trying to persuade the Land of Promise to give a square deal to people not so happily situated. Some on us in this hall, who helped to provide his country with the money that has done so much to make her the proposition she is to-day, have not forgotten her Government's dealings with the Grand Trunk Railway. Those of us in the city who happened to hold the stock have not forgotten how its proprietors were frozen out by penal legislation. I, for one, gentlemen, intend to keep that little episode in mind."

This was "some" beginning and when the Chairman went on in the racy style in which all public meetings delight, to give his opinion of the U. P. and the inevitable result of government by newspaper, the first fruits of which the country had already reaped, his words fell as seed on a prepared soil. John Endor's speech was in a different key. His platform manner

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had not the breadth, the force, the abounding humor of the Mayor's, but it did not lack "punch." There was a quality of voice, bearing and gesture which lent to a deliberate, almost leisurely choice of phrase, a moral conviction that drove every word home. The eye of the seer and the fervor of the prophet when under the discipline of the will seldom fail in their impact upon an audience of average people which often has a flair for just those qualities in which it knows itself to be lacking.

John Endor's first meeting produced a mighty reverberation. It was heard all over the City. But it was a mere prelude to the fight. And what a fight! The "graft" that Sir Munt had feared came powerfully into play. That amazing organization, the U. P., had its unseen tentacles fixed very firmly in the vitals of the nation. It was the biggest Trust in the world's history, beginning with the Government itself and filtering down through every department of commerce and public life to the smallest retail dealer and the humblest newsboy. For their interest and good will it had something substantial to barter.

The Universal Press was very popular. In the art of saying the direct opposite of what it did it had little to learn. It hurled the thunders of Jove against high prices, the Capitalist Ring, the extravagance of Government departments and oppressive taxation, but all its private acts, under the rose, were directed to the fostering of the very things it denounced in language so

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fiery. Behind everything was its fixed aim that the many should bleed for the few. Lip service to democracy was a profitable and delightfully simple game; the many, of its very nature, is easy to gull. Not having learned to think for itself, the word of its newspapers is taken for gospel. And should trouble arise, a dole from the pocket of somebody else can be relied on as a rule to repair the mischief.

So great was the power of "the machine," when it came into play, that to the people of most experience it was very doubtful indeed whether it was humanly possible to defeat "the Ring." The U. P. propaganda was subtle and it was all-pervading. Its subscribers were reckoned by the million, and, in return for countless benefits, for the most part quite illusory, a modified code of trade-union regulations was imposed upon its members. Some genius of Universe Building had devised a Roll of Good Citizenship. A certificate on vellum was granted to all the world and his wife, to whom in return for divers pledges, "the due observance of which could not fail to be of immense value to the State," divers privileges were offered.

The art of creating public opinion had been raised to a pitch unknown in the history of mankind. This half-baked Democracy of the "movie" and the cheap journal had an intellectual life wholly dependent upon catchwords, of which its mentors had a never-failing supply. None the less, the corps of registered and scientifically organized subscribers to the U. P. was a

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truly formidable body, who it was confidently believed must turn the scale at any parliamentary election.

If you wore in your buttonhole a small purple disc emblazoned with the Prince of Wales' feathers which was given you in exchange for a year's subscription, paid in advance, to the *Planet*, the *Mercury* or any of the thousand and one daily or weekly publications of the U. P. throughout the habitable globe, you were free of a great society which had the power of conferring subtle and unexpected benefits upon you. With that talisman in your buttonhole any retail grocer between China and Peru was bound to take twopence off a half-pound packet of U. P. tea. And There Was No Tea Like It. The great ones of the earth, from the Archbishop of Canterbury and Sir Augustus Bimley to Rube Rooker, the pitcher of the Chicago Pinksox and White Walker the Black Hope of South Dakota, continually affirmed that inspiring truth in tube and bus, in every newspaper, on every hoarding. There Was No Tea Like It.

It was the same with U. P. cocoa, U. P. tobacco, U. P. condensed milk, U. P. canned pears. If you bought a U. P. reach-me-down you were entitled to free membership of Blackburn Rovers, or Tottenham Hotspur, or Old Trafford, or Kennington Oval, or the U. P. Music Roll Society, or the U. P. Book Club, according to your geographical situation and your natural proclivities. Moreover, each purchase entitled you to a coupon. And if in the course of a twelve-

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month your coupons amounted to a given number, calculated upon a nicely graduated schedule, you were entitled to a new scale of benefits ranging from a freehold residence in the U. P. Garden City, or a five-cylindere U. P. automobile, to a free seat from three till five every Sunday afternoon at the local U. P. moving picture house.

These were material benefits. It was the aim of the U. P. not only to make the world safe for democracy, but also a Utopia for its subscribers to live in. If you wore a U. P. hat, it had a bearing on your bus fare between Cricklewood and East Finchley, or your tube ticket from Barons Court to the Elephant and Castle. If you required a set of false teeth or the best advice in regard to an early divorce you took out a three-year subscription to the *Planet* newspaper; if you merely needed a safety razor or a pair of button boots with glacé kid uppers, a three months' subscription to the U. P. *Literary Digest* might meet the case.

With all the resources of a brand-new cosmos at his back, a full-fledged U. P. parliamentary candidate was indeed a proposition. John Endor and his friends realized that from the start; but the character of the contest and the nature of the odds nerved them for the fight. The U. P. might weave its web, but John Endor's transparent honesty began to gain ground in spite of all that its newspapers and its "graft" could do. Blackhampton was the exact center of England in the geographical sense and at moments of crisis in the

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national life, when great decisions had sometimes to be taken on inadequate premises, that fact generally reacted on the minds of its citizens. In the local idiom "they could see as far through a brick wall as most." And in the matter of a Stunt election it was well for themselves and for the country at large that they were endowed with this faculty. Otherwise, Sir Stuyvescent Milgrim must have had a walk-over.

As it was, that gentleman and those who stood behind him were soon alive to the situation. On the surface everything seemed in their favor. The arts of the U. P. were designed for such an occasion; few could hope to stand against its peculiar blend of malfeasance; but from the outset the personal equation came into play. Endor himself was a born orator; the wife he had so recently married, with her attractive presence and her quick American wits, made a brilliantly effective figure on his platform; and with the Mayor of the City, that old idol of the populace to father them, they formed a combination which in time and place was irresistible. A John Endor meeting could always put an enemy conventicle "to bed." Nor in the matter of "sideshows," as Sir Munt called them, was the enemy allowed to have things all his own way, as might have been the case in an agricultural constituency or a dead-alive cathedral city.

Blackhampton's Mayor, having satisfied himself as to where the truth lay, was not a man for half measures. Promptly he set his hand to the plow. And it

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was set in grim earnest. The first manifestation of this fact appeared in the sky.

On the night of the procession by torchlight, just as the admired Sir Augustus Bimley was about to address the Charwomen of England from the plinth of John Bright's statue, something went suddenly wrong with that huge illuminated sky sign—Endor Must Go—which made Market Square as bright as day.

The Lord Bishop of Blackhampton was in the middle of his prayer when the noble illumination which the prelate had referred to as a light in a great darkness began to fizzle. By the time the prayer was at an end the light had gone out.

A feeling of anticlimax smote the gathering when Sir Augustus Bimley rose to address it. Endor Must Go had been taken at its word. The delegates to the Charwoman's Conference felt a sense of desolation, which the fervent language they now heard could not remove. Moreover, Britain's Best, etc., was fairly under way, his eyes in a fine frenzy rolling, when suddenly there happened a strange thing.

The U. P. masterpiece in sky signs had not been merely snuffed out; it had been eclipsed. But in a literal sense it was now outshone. From above the City Hall in gigantic letters there flamed suddenly forth across Market Square the amazing legend:

JOHN ENDOR IS JANNOCK

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The effect was immediate; and it was dramatic. It broke up the meeting. Indignation, moreover, ran so high that it came within an ace of producing a riot in the heart of the city. The friends of the U. P. candidate so deeply resented having such an important piece of their ordnance stolen and used against them, that some of the more turbulent spirits needed persuasion from the police to return quietly to their homes.

Next day the Blackhampton *Mercury* and other U. P. journals sternly demanded a public inquiry into the whole affair. None was needed really, for everybody knew the cause. All over the City it was said that "the Old Man had got at" the electricians, the chief constable and the city engineer. In the statelier words of the *Planet* newspaper, "Such an episode reflected the deepest discredit upon the city of Blackhampton." All the same, it was a coup. The enemy's Long Tom had been audaciously taken from under its nose. It was now being used with deadly effect by the other side.

An attempt was made to bring to book the culprit-in-chief, but it was not successful. Such a bird was too old to be caught napping. And for some mysterious reason the efforts that were made to repair the mischief fared no better. In spite of every precaution, the electric current of "Endor Must Go" failed night after night, while neither the British climate nor untoward circumstance was allowed to interfere with the opposition sky sign "John Endor is Jannock."

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This sinister fact brought woe to the camp of Sir Stuyvescent Milgrim. The moral effect was considerable; the whole city was kept laughing. It was just the sort of thing, said the U. P. agent, that was likely to lose the election. In the meantime, the comedy of the Firework Fizzle was worked for all it was worth by its ingenious author. At every public meeting, in alluding to it, Sir Munt was able to make new points, while the original devisers of the stunt waxed more furious. All kinds of analogies, humorously damaging, were drawn from this affair. Soon all the world began to see that every audacious stroke of badinage was one nail the more in the enemy's coffin.

Presently a whisper arose that the greatest and most up-to-date of all Stunt elections was going to end, like the wonderful sky sign, in a fizzle. Certainly that fizzle had grown symbolical. The U. P. was in danger of being hoist with its own weapons. Even the other side—for generations Blackhampton had been notoriously a "sporting" city—did not try to minimize the humor and the significance of the case. At the end of a week of nightly fiascos, while John Endor Is Jannock seemed to wax ever brighter in the heavens and its *vis-à-vis* more dismally waned, the sportsmen of Blackhampton—even the dogs were held to be sportsmen in Blackhampton—took a continual delight in the affair. Sir Munt had surpassed himself. He looked like winning the election off his own bat.

Blackhampton grew prouder than ever of its Old

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Man. He had an amazing faculty of "getting right home." And there were other shots in his locker. The U. P. airships, hovering proudly above Market Square, grew subject to mysterious deflations. But the greatest coup of all, the Old Man's masterstroke, was the "running in" of Aunt Mittie, that voluble and truculent lady, on a charge of brawling, and her admonition from the bench of the City Hall.

As polling day drew on the fun grew faster and more furious. Newspaper bombast, of which the candidate of the Ring had a complete monopoly, could only be countered by the simple truth. And the clear facts of the case, presented with force and skill, were very effective. It was all very well to obscure the issues at stake by the arts of up-to-date journalism, but those in touch with the situation soon began to realize that what Sir Munt called "hot air by the cubit" had lost its virtue.

John Endor, in the meantime, was adding daily to the number of his friends. In the man himself there was something British, forthright and sincere, which did much to sustain the cause for which he was fighting. That cause was the honesty of public life. Such an ideal ceased to be possible the moment an all-powerful Trust was allowed to govern the country through its own nominees.

As defined by John Endor, there could be no mistaking the issue. Much was at stake. Democracy was not merely on its trial, it was fighting for its life.

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Could the shrewd sons and daughters of the Midlands, lulled like so many of their kind by false catchwords and pleasant sophistries, be roused in time from their sleep?

The question was now being asked by the wisest heads in the land. And a wave of relief flowed over the country when it was known that the new Home Secretary, his colors nailed to the mast in open defiance of the U. P. and all its works, had been returned for East Blackhampton by a majority of nearly five thousand votes.

XL

THE fight won, John and Helen went back to London, strong in a sense of victory. It was, of course, the business of the Ring to minimize what had occurred so far as it was able to do so. But facts are stubborn things; an enhanced majority in favor of one who had been bold enough to throw down the gage of battle to the U. P. could neither be ignored nor explained away.

At Westminster itself this could not be gainsaid. There was no escape from the blunt truth that the incredible had happened. The result of the Blackhampton election brought dismay to more than one nominee of the Ring on the Government benches. It was the writing on the wall with a vengeance.

Still for the accomplished trimmer all was not lost. He could still cling to his famous motto, "Nothing succeeds like success." Part and parcel of the race of trimmers, flesh of its flesh, bone of its bone, it even takes precedence of its other famous motto "Honesty is the best policy." "So glad, old man, you brought it off." Slap on the back. "Quite sure you would."

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Grasp of the hand. "Downed the dirty dogs, eh?"
Punch in the ribs.

The blushing victor had much of this kind of thing to endure in the first few days of his return to town. He was in no sense a cynic, for his eyes looked steadily towards the future, but even he was aware that the most rejoicing voices were those which would have been still louder had the cat jumped the other way.

Watching the cat jump, that art, too, was ever important. Truly wonderful was the effect now wrought upon the Mother of Parliaments. The Slippery One had brought off the biggest thing since the Famous Lie in the middle of that prehistoric period of the Great War which had founded the fortune of more than one grave and reverend parliamentarian and had reduced the country to the verge of ruin. This new stroke of daring had been so cunningly timed that its success was said to be a masterpiece of strategy, a triumph of tactical insight by those who would have been the first to brand its failure, from whatever cause, as a lapse into premature senility on the part of a mind outwardly strong and vigorous.

Mr. Wilberforce Williams shared to the full in the congratulations showered upon his brilliant lieutenant. Some of the more volatile friends of the moment tried to draw the prime minister as to the date of the General Election which now was going to be a matter of such vital concern to the world at large. But Mr. Wilberforce Williams lay low and said Nuffin. He knew

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Nuffin. It almost seemed in point of fact that Nuffinness had been permanently emblazoned upon his politely specious countenance.

In many dovecotes there was, all the same, a mighty flutter. On the side of the angels, amid honorable and right honorable gentlemen all over the House, there was much anticipatory preening of feathers. The plain English of the matter was the country would not stand for a buccaneering war with China. Also there was now a second vital consideration to face. Endor with foolhardy courage had made the curbing of the U. P. the first plank in his platform, yet the result had justified him. The whole country was now alive to the extreme peril of the Newspaper Ring and it was in a mood for action.

Said the pundits, it would need a new constitution to do it. But the super-pundits didn't think so. Or even granting that such was the case, there would be no difficulty. Since the U. P. had taken the affairs of the nation in hand, a new constitution could be delivered every morning with the punctuality of the *Planet*, the *Mercury* or the U. P. Milk in U. P. germ-proof bottles.

John Endor was Home Secretary now. A man not yet forty, with only a few years' experience of parliamentary life, his rise had been singularly rapid. Without being called upon to serve an apprenticeship in a minor office, at one leap he had reached the Cabinet. True, it was almost the worst Cabinet that had

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ever misgoverned the country, but at its head was a man of great abilities. And this man, faced with a terrible menace to the world's peace, was bent upon the only remedy. Come what might, Saul Hartz, "the secret power behind the throne of antichrist," in the picturesque phrase of John Endor—the prime minister himself preferred the saponaceous to the picturesque—must at all costs be broken.

To this end Mr. Williams, with discreet assistance from the Crown lawyers, set himself to devise a Bill. His task was not light, for directly or indirectly almost every salaried official, not to say every wage-earning person in the Island, was now affiliated to the Ring. The measure was on lines long familiar in America, but in "free" Britain it was something new.

The Wilberforce Williams Anti-Trust Law was designed for the castration of the U. P. For that reason it was doubtful if it would ever find its way to the statute book. But as its sponsor mildly said, "There is no harm in trying." From the first, the prime minister was extremely modest about this measure. For one thing, personal modesty was the prime minister's long suit. On the Front Bench, on the platform, at the dinner table, on the golf course, at an evening party, he had always been so modest as to seem apologetic, not to say deprecatory. "Really, my dear sir—to think that I—of all people—should be asked to form a government—why, my dear sir—you know as well as I do—that the idea is positively—ah—ludicrous."

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Wilberforce Williams had raised self-effacement to a fine art, yet somehow he had got there just the same. While the Really Great Talents slept, the Slippery One had climbed upwards in the night. And once in office, although the fact was by no means clear to the world at large, he was there "for keeps." He had got in, nobody quite knew how. With equal truth that formula applied to the question of his getting out.

If Mr. Williams said little as to the prospects of his Bill, as to its character he was reticence itself. The most accomplished Cat-Jumpers, herded in solid phalanx, tier upon tier, on both sides of the House could get hardly a word out of him. Slippery Sam was not exactly beloved, but since the Blackhampton Election his stock as a political entity had risen. To have spiked the U. P. batteries so neatly at such a fateful moment clearly meant that W. W. had known how to read the skies. Every professional legislator now began to feel in his bones that one of the much dread periodical reactions was at hand.

Could it be that the power of the U. P. was on the wane? It had promised the Millennium and was doing its best to deliver the goods, but it was so like human nature to be in rather a hurry in these little matters. The price of all commodities, "hot air" excepted, was at an immoral height; unemployment, starvation, suppressed communism were rife on every hand; taxation was cruel, the depreciation of securities went on and on; an all-pervading sense of disaster

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struck ever nearer the surface. The Millennium was surely coming, all the morning and evening journals said so, but in the meantime life for the ordinary ratepayer was growing impossible. Yet, said the noble army of Cat-Jumpers, with Blackhampton East now before their eyes, the hour of deliverance is near. Hence, the Anti-Trust Law! Hence, Down with the U. P.! Hence, the pyramids!

In the present condition of Denmark it was unwise to take anything for granted, but one fact was clear. The country was in bonds, but a recent event had shown that it was possible for its chains to be shed.

If deliverance was to come, however, it was now felt that the task would devolve upon one man. John Endor, in the opinion of the insiders, was that man. His recent victory was a torch. It focused every eye in the world of politics upon him. No one else could have won that battle, at any rate in just that way; and it became at once a talisman for all the spirits by nature free, whom the degrading conditions of modern political life were galling beyond endurance.

All things were possible now for John Endor. The dragon which was crushing the life out of the nation was not invulnerable. And one of the very few daily newspapers outside the Ring which had any authority, crystallized the feeling now uppermost in every perceptive mind when it came out one evening with its famous cartoon "The New Perseus."

XLI

MARRIED life could not have begun more hopefully for John and Helen. They started house-keeping in a tiny but charming house in Brompton Square, the lease of which they had been able to acquire on reasonable terms. It was great fun assembling their modest household gods. These had to accord strictly with their means; therefore, a case for taste and discretion. But these were happy days. A high faith in each other had been confirmed by the ordeal through which they had just passed. Reputation was in a measure theirs before the Blackhampton election; but it was now enhanced, consolidated by a resounding victory which filled the mouth of the world.

It was glorious to be young, to be strong, to be one in dedication to a great task. Much would be demanded of them. They must prepare to live laboriously. Yet a vista had opened before their eyes. Inspiration came to them hour by hour. During the first few weeks of marriage it seemed to John Endor that God was in His Heaven after all.

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For both this was a time of growth. And yet, as always, somewhere in the mind of Endor lurked a pre-vision of things to come. A dark shadow was seldom absent from his thoughts. Had it been possible, he would have blotted from his life some recent, brief, but horribly poignant passages. To none, however, is it given to undo the past. In a moment of weakness he had sunk to the level of an unclean foe. He was pledged now to return felon stroke for felon stroke. If he could but efface that hour of moral failure what would he not give!

He dare not tell Helen his secret. By locking away deep in his heart the memory of a tragic lapse he tried to stifle it. But he was never allowed to forget that it was there. Well he knew that the enemy would not yield to dictation from anybody. Saul Hartz, upheld by the power that had carried him so far, would dare the Council of Seven to its worst.

John Endor saw all that with fatal clearness. And soon there fell on him a black despair. "O ye of little faith!" was the cry torn from him in secret as each morning he opened his letters. The recoil of a famous victory was far-reaching, as each day's post brought evidence. On every side, from quarters diverse and unexpected, squires came forth with a demand for this bold knight to lead them out to battle with the grisly monster in whose toils the country groaned.

The hour was ripe. One of his power, his inward vision, might lead them anywhere. He was begin-

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ning to make all the world see, as a Bright or a Gladstone would have done, to what a pass the nation had been brought. He had underrated the moral fiber of his countrymen. In a moment of blindness he had allowed himself to despair of the State—of that State in which he so fully believed that he was ready to make almost any sacrifice, in order to serve it.

What should he do? Saul Hartz was still Saul Hartz, a being of volcanic will. And that will had now become a creative force which seemed to transcend that of men. In the mind of John Endor it was a symbol. Here for one wrought upon by the fires of imagination was the embodiment of the spirit that denied. But if there was a God in the world, and the first weeks of marriage, a time of rare happiness and sanity, had taught him that surely there must be, He must be left to deal with this monster in His own way, at His own time. If Endor himself and the secret society to which he was pledged usurped terrible functions which his conscience could never approve, they, too, must sink to the level of the thing they sought to destroy.

John Endor knew now that he was on the horns of an inescapable dilemma. The body of fanatics and visionaries whose will he had sworn to do would not be in the least likely to release him from his vows. It was not the way of such a camarilla. Once a member, always a member. Before God he would have to assume full responsibility for its acts. And that knowledge was a viper in his breast. How could he

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hope to keep every nerve braced for the fight with such a horror eating out his very life!

A little consideration of a state of affairs which hardly bore thinking about brought home to John Endor that there could be only one course for him now. At all costs, he must cut loose from this *Vehmgericht*. Likely enough it could only be done at the price of life itself. But done it must be.

XLII

MINDS there are of a psychic quality which seem to anticipate events. John Endor had this sort of mind. It hardly surprised him, therefore, when, on the morning after his resolve had been made, he found among his letters one summoning him to a meeting of the Council of Seven. His inner consciousness, it almost seemed, had grown aware that some such ukase was on its way.

The time and place appointed were the Sunday following at an old house in Kent. Roland Holles was the owner of the house. And in the name of the Society, he urged upon Endor in a private note the supreme importance of the occasion. In no circumstances must he fail to appear.

It so happened that Endor had another week-end engagement. But with everything at stake, there was but one thing to do. The prior engagement, of importance in its way, simply had to be broken. Helen, therefore, had to go to Cloudesley alone; she had, moreover, to make the best excuses she could for the eleventh hour default of her eminent husband. And

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this was the more unfortunate because a number of political and social big-wigs were foregathering at this famous week-end trysting place in the Midlands in the hope of meeting the new Home Secretary.

The odd circumstances of the case forebade any explanation. And in the face of Endor's general evasiveness, it needed all the clear-headed loyalty of a newly married wife to avert a first rift in the lute. Beyond a few vague reasons which bore no analysis, this sudden and unpardonable desertion had to be left undefended. Not a hint could be given of the tragic coil in which he was involved. It was indeed a test of Helen's faith to go forth alone among strangers with a hastily improvised excuse for the nonappearance of her husband.

On Sunday morning Endor motored down into Kent. He was in a state of mental darkness as great perhaps as any through which he had yet passed. Bitterly he realized his folly. He was in a terrible morass. Now that he was his true self, he saw that this Society, to which he was bound by a most solemn oath of allegiance, was itself a menace to the world. No matter what the abuses it set out to destroy, to a mind of perfect balance it hardly admitted of question that the nostrum was at least as bad as the disease.

During a two hours' journey into the Weald of Kent, he gave furious thought to the problem before him. At all hazards he must free himself from the toils of those whom he now felt to be inimical to so-

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ciety itself. But was it possible to get free? From the note of urgency in the summons it was clear that great decisions were about to be taken. And by the oath that bound him he would have to accept a full share of responsibility for those decisions whatever they might be.

Busshe Court was Endor's destination. A wonderful old house, set in the very heart of "the garden of England," this first visit must have interested him deeply had it taken place at another time. In the half-light of a winter noon the place had an air of medieval romance and mystery. Before a low stone portico stood the owner of the house, who, without a hat and in a suit of country tweeds, looked a typical and singularly handsome English squire. Common report said that Roland Holles wore more than one large bee in his bonnet. So it might be, yet there was no denying the picturesque force, the rather sinister attraction, of a rare personality.

Endor met with a cordial welcome. The company differed from the one gathered at Rose Carburton's eight weeks before. No women were there. Reckoning Endor and his host, the company assembled at the luncheon with which the proceedings began consisted of seven men. Lien Weng and Bandar Ali, representative of the immemorial East, were of the number; and in the persons of George Hierons, Felix de Tournel and Amadeo Negretti, there were also represented America, France and Italy.

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The talk at table in English was grave and copious and informed. In agreeable contrast to the rather embarrassed restraint of eight weeks before, when women were of the company, there was now the freedom usually to be found among men of a like way of thought. The presence of servants in the room acted as a check, it was true. Until they retired it was impossible to approach the real business of that gathering, but the talk, spontaneous and yet weighty, sustained, moreover, by choice fare, did not flag.

Endor himself, an accomplished man of the world, felt before this meal was half through that the men about him had a depth of thought, a play of ideas, a range, an authority beyond any he had met with. Had he had a mind at ease it would have been a delightful experience. Here it almost seemed, in the stimulus of the hour, was gathered the salt of the earth. Yet, in spite of the talk, the wine and the food, not for an instant could he forget the terrible problem which confronted him.

At the end of the meal, as soon as coffee and cigars had been handed, the servants left the room. The host, thereupon, called at once upon Lien Weng formally to constitute the Court and open the session. This proved a quite simple proceeding. These men, all more or less familiar with the world of high affairs, well understood the valuable art of dispensing with preliminaries. So easy of manner was the President and so adept were his methods that Endor to his deep chagrin

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allowed himself to be taken by surprise. With sharp annoyance he grew aware that the business was actually under way before he had even begun to attempt to define his own position.

It was not a moment for hesitation. At the risk of discourtesy Endor sprang to his feet. "I am truly sorry to interrupt," he said to Lien Weng, "but before these proceedings are carried a step farther, please allow me to say this. I have come here, not to transact business, but to sever my connection with this Society."

The speech, brief as it was, had the effect of a thunderbolt. Every face around the table was anxious, startled, incredulous. Lien Weng, alone, kept a perfect impassiveness. He lifted his right hand delicately and without a glance at the others, he said in his sweet, cooing voice, "Sir, that is impossible. Believe me, sir, it is quite—quite—quite impossible."

Endor had foreseen even this blunt and final non possumus. It did not deter him, therefore, from stating fully his attitude. He admitted frankly that he had entered into his vows at a time of mental and moral overthrow; but now that his mind was established once more on the plane of reason, he was not prepared to go on with a thing that had lost the sanction of his conscience.

"I fear you cannot be allowed to withdraw, sir," said Lien Weng, softly. "Your vows were made on the clear understanding that on no grounds conceivable must they ever be broken. Once a member of the

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Society of the Friends of Peace, always a member."

An undercurrent of stern approval from those seated round the table drove the plain words home.

"All that you say, sir, I recognized at the time," said Endor. "So much I freely own. But as I now wish to make clear, owing to a cause which in a measure was physical I was then suffering from an eclipse of the moral judgment."

Lien Weng shook his head gently. There was a brief pause. And then with the peculiar amenity of a deep mind at grips with destiny itself, he went on as if nothing had occurred, to expound the position the Society had now reached in the matter of Saul Hartz and the Universal Press.

XLIII

ENDOR, from the first, had felt that he would not be able to get free. And now, his protest made, his own position fully disclosed, he saw that for the time being, at any rate, there was nothing more that he could do.

In the moments that immediately followed, a mind cruelly torn became a house divided against itself. One part of his brain, wherein lurked the eternal verities, assured him that this illicit assembly, this Council of Seven, was no place for John Endor. And yet in another part of his ethos, an influence, alien, but of extreme potency, was also at work. The cold logic of the matter was that on the issue that had been raised Lien Weng and his associates were perfectly right. In a matter of this kind, no man could be permitted to forswear allegiance. That was only just and fair. And it was reasonable that one who did so must pay a full penalty. The question of questions now for John Endor, or at least for the political part of a mind-at-war, was how, when, in what fashion must the penalty be paid?

If, following at once upon his protest he withdrew

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from the deliberations of the Council, he put himself irrevocably out of court. On the other hand, if he stayed where he was and bore a part in its transactions, he would be committed by implication to any act upon which it might decide. The problem for a man faced with such a far-reaching issue was almost insoluble, but, after a moment of intense emotion, some deep instinct of policy called upon him to remain.

The hour which followed in the beautiful but smoke-laden Busshe Court dining room had an entrancing interest for John Endor. Nothing could have been more severely business-like than the methods of the Council of Seven. In a few words, chosen with much skill, Lien Weng made everything quite clear.

Saul Hartz had ignored the recommendations of the Society of the Friends of Peace and the period of grace had now expired. And, in accordance with the rules, by which all present were under a solemn pact to abide, this man, a direct menace to the peace of the world, must die.

The Seven differed in one instance from the body which had adjudicated recently in the matter of William Garland, the notorious Labor Leader, who had chosen also to defy the Society. D'Alvarez, better known as El Santo, upon whom had devolved the task of doing Garland to death, had carried it out successfully. He had therefore been granted from these deliberations the release, which by the laws of the Society, he was entitled to claim. In his stead appeared the

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Society's most recent and not least important recruit, John Endor.

So much, in a brief summary, Lien Weng made clear. It now remained for the seven men sitting round the table to devise a means of doing Saul Hartz to death. In such cases the practice was, under a veil of strict secrecy to draw lots as to who must bear this terrible burden.

The procedure was for each member of the Council to write his name on a slip of paper, fold it up and place it in a small black velvet bag. After this receptacle had been shaken by all in turn, the last comer to the deliberations of the Council was allowed to draw one name from the bag. It was then shaken again by the six members whose names remained, and then the person whose name had been drawn was required to take from the bag a second slip of paper. Upon this was to be found the name of him who in accordance with the Society's rules must do its will.

As soon as Lien Weng had explained what the procedure was and before any part of it could be set in motion, John Endor rose a second time to speak. He now addressed himself mainly to George Hierons the American, and to his own countryman, Roland Holles. In the stress of the moment he did not hesitate to appeal to them as fellow members of the Anglo-Saxon world, men of his own race and blood, white men, men of western training and ideas to whom such proceedings as these must be subversive in the last degree.

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The appeal, brief as it was, had all the cogency of an orator finely skilled in the art of appealing to the emotions. Speaking with absolute conviction, his words, it was clear, made a considerable impression upon those to whom they were addressed. The Frenchman and the Italian also felt their impact, but Lien Weng and Bandar Ali could not conceal a deep resentment in spite of the mask of calm politeness with which they tried to cover it.

"Believing as we do," were Endor's final words, "that this man, Saul Hartz, is the incarnation of evil and that he is a threat to the future of mankind, I am now convinced that the only true way of removing this dark shadow is to set in apposition to it the idea of God. Eight weeks ago, when I took my vow, for the moment I had lost my vision of the Eternal. It has now returned to me and I see that, as at present constituted, the Society of the Friends of Peace, albeit inspired by the highest of all human motives, cannot hope to achieve its aim."

Endor's protest made, he sat down again at the table. He must now abide the issue. Clairvoyantly he awaited the slow unfolding of an odd ritual. The proceedings began with curious solemnity. As the latest member of the Council of Seven, the task devolved upon himself of drawing from the velvet bag the first slip of paper.

Should he or should he not bear his part? It was a momentous decision to have to take. But there shot

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through his mind a clear perception of the fact that there was really no alternative. He was under oath to obey the rules of the Society or pay the heaviest penalty of all.

One glance at the faces around the table told him quite plainly that the penalty would be exacted. These men were not to be trifled with. He would die like a rat in a trap. And such an exit would not save Saul Hartz, nor would it help the future of mankind.

On the spur of the moment Endor had to decide. By a withdrawal now from the Council of Seven he would gain nothing and yet he would lose his life. Was he ready to lose it? Was he ready to lose it without a struggle for the vindication of his ideals? Automatically, yet with a subtle sense of coercion from the powerful minds around him, he dipped his hand into the velvet bag and drew out one of the slips of paper.

Unfolding the strip with a feeling of irresponsibility a little bizarre he found that on it was written the name George Hierons.

The rules now required that upon the American should devolve the duty of taking from the velvet bag the name of him who was called to a dreadful task.

A hush fell upon the table. In a silence that was physical torture to more than one around that bright mahogany, the strings at the bag's mouth were pulled tight, and then the bag itself was handed to George Hierons.

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In this moment of exquisite torment, it was as if something broke inside John Endor's heart.

Even before the second slip was drawn from the bag, and the name it bore was made known, Endor realized, as if by the magic of an occult power, that in an especial manner Fate had marked him down. Before the impassive American opened this paper and announced its contents, the latest member of the Council saw and heard his own name:

JOHN ENDOR

When seconds later that name was pronounced, he gave a little gasp. He felt the burning eyes of the others envelop him. Overcome by emotion, he was unable to meet those eyes and bent his own to the table. A nausea of dismay bereft him of the power to think or act. But all too soon there came to his ear the calm and precise speech of Lien Weng.

"John Endor," said the President in a small soft voice, not unlike a cat's purr, that turned to ice the blood of the man whom he addressed, "you are called, within the term of eight days, reckoning from this Sunday midnight, to kill the man Saul Hartz by the method ordained in such cases by the Council of Seven. What that method is, it is now our duty to reveal."

XLIV

FROM the depths of his gorgeous robe, Lien Weng took a small gun-metal case. A spring released the top. Within was a tiny glass phial, in the form of a syringe, containing about an ounce of a colorless fluid. So delicate was the whole contrivance that it could be concealed in the palm of one hand.

After Lien Weng had placed it on the table in front of him, he went on to explain its nature and its use.

The fluid was the most subtle and the most deadly poison science had yet evolved. Distilled in minute quantities by a recent chemical process from a rare herb indigenous to the Manchurian wilds, the secret was known to the Society alone, and its use was strictly regulated by its laws. In operation, as Lien Weng explained, it was very simple. By discharging the contents of the phial on the back of a person's coat, of no matter what thickness, at a point midway between the shoulder blades, it would percolate in the course of less than three hours to the spinal marrow. And, without warning of any kind, it would bring about a sudden and

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complete collapse of the nervous system. Death would at once ensue and not leave a trace of its cause. So subtle was the work of this poison that it defied all medical diagnosis. Its operation was impossible to detect. Autopsies were vain. The police of London, New York, Bombay, Shanghai could only surmise that such a thing existed without being able to prove the fact. Indeed they were faced by a problem with which they could not deal; a problem so elusive that it merged cause in effect.

Succinctly and gently, with the air of a British judge addressing a British jury, Lien Weng expounded all this to John Endor. He was required to use the lethal weapon formally entrusted to him now by the decree of the Council of Seven within the time appointed and in the manner specified.

"And if, sir, one does not choose to carry out this horrible task?" said Endor, quietly.

"Sir," was the President's soft reply, "since you have taken the oath of our Society is it really necessary for me to answer your question?"

Endor looked earnestly at the faces of the six men around him, as if he would peer into their minds. Again he was undecided as to what his immediate course of action should be. His first thought was to defy these fanatics by flinging the phial into the fire. But as his fingers closed upon the slender tube of glass, the mysterious *prana* deep down in every healthy nature intervened to save him. An overt act of that

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kind, as the faces around told him very surely, would mean certain death.

At the call of an obscure law of being Endor slowly returned the cylinder to its gun-metal sheath. And then fully sensible of six pairs of eyes fixed upon him, he took from his breast pocket a cigarette case and calmly placed within it this most deadly of weapons.

"Sir, you have until to-morrow Monday week at midnight," were Lien Weng's final words.

Once more Endor looked at the circle of faces around him. Of the thoughts they concealed he could glean nothing beyond a covert hostility in the eyes of Bandar Ali and a look of deep anxiety in those of George Hierons. The American was seated next to him. At this terrible moment, in which Endor knew that his own death sentence had been pronounced, and even in this most dangerous company, he was not without a friend.

As Endor got up from the table he felt upon his arm a slight pressure, soothing yet magnetic. It was as if that gentle touch spoke its own silent message, "For heaven's sake, my friend," it seemed to say, "do nothing hastily. Let your slightest action now be the fruit of wisdom."

In spite of this tacit prayer, Endor yielded to the all-powerful desire now in his mind. He would fly at once from this house of ill omen. Before he left the room, however, he was moved to speak again.

"One last word!" As Endor reached the door he

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turned swiftly to face the men who were still seated at the table. "I believe," he said, in a voice strained and thin, "that Providence itself has given me a means, a lawful means, of breaking this malign power which you would have me unlawfully destroy. You, who at all costs are pledged to conserve the peace of the world, cannot hope to gain your end by secret murder. I beg you to give me a chance to prove that the Divine Will is working for us and for all mankind."

The passion of this last appeal drew no response from the six men at the table. Mutely impassive they watched that rather wild figure withdraw from the room.

Endor at once ordered his car. He was bent on going back to London immediately. Not another hour could he endure the fetid air of Busshe Court.

XLV

HELEN, meanwhile, was spending the week-end at Cloudesley. And here, too, in the famous Midland home of a great political magnate, certain strange things happened.

To begin with, Mrs. John Endor had to make the best excuses she could for the non-arrival of her distinguished husband. He had "chucked" at the last moment, and it was not easy to forget that fact. The party was large and made up of heterogeneous elements. But more than one of its members had looked forward to spending a certain amount of time in the interesting company of the new Home Secretary. Keen disappointment was expressed by host, hostess and guests alike. Helen's excuses for the absentee sounded in her own ears rather hollow, but she had tact enough to make them sound convincing in the ear of others.

All the same, her brief Saturday afternoon to Monday morning sojourn in a huge barracks of a house was to prove a particularly trying ordeal. Not that there was any lack of creature comforts. But the or-

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deal might be said to begin shortly after seven o'clock, just as she was about to ascend the famous white marble staircase to dress for the evening meal. For it came to Helen like a veritable blow to behold Saul Hartz, newly arrived, stride with an air of calm proprietorship into the entrance hall.

At the sight of him, her heart gave a leap. This indeed, was a bird of ill omen. She had not in the least expected him to be there. Not that there was any reason why he shouldn't be. He had the *entrée* to nearly every house in England; and in most the art of the *charmeur*, great when he chose to use it, and his range of information made him a more than welcome guest. To Helen, however, it simply had not occurred that she was likely to meet him. As disconsolately she made a slow ascent of those imposing stairs, she could have wished that the new Home Secretary had followed the practice of Royalty by demanding a list of the people who had been invited to meet him!

To add to Helen's embarrassment, it fell out that the Colossus took her in to dinner. She would have given much merely to avoid talk with him or even the lightest contact with his arm. Yet surely this was Fate. And from Fate there can be no appeal. At the moment he crossed the room to claim her with a bow and a smile, she felt in her bones that this meeting had to be.

Since John had told her of the diabolical aspersions this man had cast upon her good name, they had not

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met. In spite of all that she owed Saul Hartz, and she still felt it was much, her resentment was deep, just, implacable. Pride forbade the showing that her wound was still raw, but she could not help letting him see, even had she had the wish to prevent it, that she was now in the thrall of an icy antagonism. And yet with what mastery, what subtle art was this man able to toy with her fine feelings!

At the dinner table he was irresistible. She sought escape at first by turning quickly to a pompous and monosyllabic politician seated at the other side of her. But that didn't answer. Even more than usual Saul Hartz was dominant. When he liked to exert his great powers, he was the most compelling man she had ever known. The fact that he saw beyond his kind gave barbs to his wit, a depth to his insight, spice to his knowledge, a form to his philosophy.

When this man unbent, there was none like him. Helen once again had to render him that justice. With that strange, remote whisper he could dominate half the large room if he chose; or if, as he now preferred, he chose to confine himself to the young and singularly attractive woman at his side, she, too, must yield to its mystic spells.

The Colossus was never more the Colossus than this evening. All about him were mainly strangers—he was a man of many acquaintances and no friends—and no doubt there were secret enemies in their midst, but he paid them scant regard. He was willing, more

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than willing, that "his dear Helen" should claim it all.

She fought against him, but it was no use. He spread before her the jewels of his mind and her soul was dazzled. Ever and again, the thought recurred to her that there was none like him. None could there ever be. If demigods there were, to-night Saul Hartz was of their kin.

From the very hour of their first meeting some two years ago at his office in New York she had felt the sense of his power. And now hating him implacably as she did and as she must, he seemed to be raised to a power yet higher. His will, his courage, his imagination made her think of him now as a latter-day Haroun-al-Raschid. But he was something more. He saw beyond the Beyond. To Helen, as he revealed himself in the course of this unforgettable evening, he was like one who had rifled a sealed envelope and read its forbidden contents.

His talk in its abandon was that of one who cares for none of the world's standards. It was the talk of one who defied God and man; of one who looks beyond experience; of one who saw so much that he accepted nothing. Deep in the heart of Helen was a desire to pity him. He was indeed a figure for pity. A noble mind was straining its moorings. Chartless, rudderless it might soon be out in an open sea.

In the two months that had passed since she had last talked with Saul Hartz, a subtle change had taken place in him. Something had happened to the man

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himself. Those hooded eyes still veiled their fires, but in the face to which they lent a luster and a value was the look of death. With a flash of vision it came upon Helen that the Colossus was now living in its shadow.

That fact, if fact it was, explained the man to-night. He seemed to know that the end was near. And it was as if he was trying not to care. After all he had had a pretty good inning. He was only fifty-four, still in the prime of his years as other men reckoned them, but a single year as the Colossus lived it was more than a lustrum for those of normal chemistry. Measured in terms of achievement, brain tissue, dynamic power, the fifty-four years of Saul Hartz could be multiplied by ten.

Slowly, with a stealth that at first she did not perceive, the spell of an old fascination came again upon Helen. She did not forget his depth of wickedness. With a shudder that had a tinge of joy she recognized that the mind and will so delicately enfolding hers did evil for the love of evil; but yet she felt, too, as she had always done, that there was nothing ignoble in his choice of the baser part. At the worst, it belonged to a false philosophy of life. It was part of his giantism, his lust of power for power's sake.

"All the silly gnats"—a big wine was in his glass—"all the silly gnats who swarm in bus and tube, who line up in queues for theaters and movies, who devour bookstalls and live on our headlines, well, well! One-

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hell-of-a-muss, isn't it, my dear? No place for people as sane as you and me."

She was left a little stunned by the logical ferocity of a mind so modern, and yet so subversive of all things that seemed to make like livable.

XLVI

AFTER dinner, in the privacy of an inner drawing room, Saul Hartz sought Helen again. It was agony almost for her to be with him, to hear his strange voice clothe yet stranger words; and yet it was a form of experience that no constructive mind would ever willingly forego. She was a woman of strong will, a woman sound in heart and brain, but of a sudden there returned upon her the memory of that night of subtle fear, some two months back, when she had paid a surprise visit to Carlton House Terrace—that unforgettable night of his dealing the man she loved a felon's blow. Not then had she known him for the thing he was. For her, at least, his purpose was still masked. But now everything was clear. The hood had lifted, the veil was rent. He stood forth, open and declared, an enemy of mankind.

The knowledge filled Helen with curious emotion. She now felt the challenge of his nature in a way that frightened her. Beside her sat the very genius of negation. Was not she, too, just a poor silly gnat? The sense of his sheer animal power made her almost long

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at this moment to feel his arms about her; with his sorcery upon her she half wished that his lips would crush out her life. And she knew that she was powerless. As he sat very close to her in that cushioned nook, she might have been under the spell of a fabulous monster. Shivering with fear, she began to realize that her defenses were failing. Raised to this pitch, such a creature was all that had been, all that could ever be. Somehow she felt that the old prophecies were true. The living, sentient being whose hand now held hers was the incarnation of Evil.

Was he, to whom in the past she owed so much, about to amuse himself in the rôle of Don Juan? Pray heaven he would be content to-night with that of Lucifer! Oh, why had she come to this house? Oh, why had she come there alone?

She felt the touch of a cool palm on her lightly clad knees. It brought riot to her brain a hint of madness. She tried to free herself, but laughingly he pinned her down. If she could but get away! Held by his will she could hardly move or breathe. Was it possible, despite all she could do, that he was about to make good his vile boast of two months back? Where was the God in whom she believed? One part of her mind besought that Friend who for her had always been at the back of everything, while the other part glimpsed the joys of surrender to one who had declared war upon authority.

With an insight which she felt to be terrifying, the

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Colossus was able to read her thought. To him the human mind was an open page. Looking deep into those honest eyes he smiled at the naked terror that he saw there. With a softness more than feline he began to stroke the delicate fabric of *crêpe de chine* that so inefficiently covered her. "If I ask you to put your arms about my neck and kiss me, what will you do?" Not by the lips was that speech uttered, but by eyes that glowed and burned like those which glow and burn in jungle grass.

She tried again to get away. But with the flick of a paw he cast her back to her cushions and held her. "One can never understand," he purred with an odd gentleness whose effect upon her was as wine and music, "why a creature of your intelligence, and particularly a woman, should ever truly believe that Right must triumph and Wrong must fail."

"One does believe it, all the same."

His laugh drove the blood from her heart. "And that is so amazing! Look at this horrible world we live in for our sins, and tell me quite honestly if there is any evidence at all of a power more benign than an impersonal, blind, animal force? The wind blows, the clouds rain, the stars shine. Some of us who are geared high smoke big cigars and own newspapers; some of us, geared not so high, are women broken in body and soul, whose daughters are on the streets and whose sons have been condemned by the State to the battue. So much, my dear girl, for this God of yours! On this

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little planet, you can't tell me, He is making any headway at all."

She felt as if he had hit her in the face. "I do believe," she gasped. "And—and—no matter what happens"—his grip was on her shrinking knees—"to me—or to mine—I shall go on believing."

"And I shall go on disbelieving." He chuckled softly. "All the same, I like your pluck!" The father was speaking again to a favorite daughter. Helen shivered at the intolerable memories wrought by that tone. "How well you fight with your back to the wall." He raised her hand in his and pressed his lips upon it lightly. "I respect your courage." Voice and smile grew even more paternal. "And between ourselves, that is the only thing in the life one knows that one does respect. Courage. That alone is sacred. Courage. No matter when, no matter where one meets that, one pays homage."

Smiling at his thoughts, he got up from the sofa on which they sat. As he stood before her in the arrogance of his mental and physical power, she could not kill a sense, try to stifle it as she would, that here perhaps was the noblest thing on which her eyes had looked.

He still kept close track of her mind. "Bless you, dear child!" She felt his eyes pass through her like a sword, and she bit her lip in an agony that had a touch of ecstasy. And then came terror again. She fought against a sob she could not control. Hearing

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it, he sighed tenderly. "One mustn't hurt you too much," he said, half to himself. "You've always been a particularly nice girl. I have always liked you." His voice had grown gentle, charming, whimsical. "Good luck. *Bon voyage*. You are a good woman. Your husband is a good man. And I am a very, very bad one. But please remember that it is against all experience to suppose that the bad people don't come out on top. Believe me, they always do—and they always must."

XLVII

THAT night Helen slept little. Her talk with Saul Hartz had proved cruelly disturbing to the mind and to the emotions. She was haunted by it. For hours she lay awake thinking of this man who had played so strange a part in her life. Seeing him now as the thing he truly was, her fear of him was unnerving. It troubled her that they should be under one roof. She had an insurgent desire to seek at once the safety of her home. There could be no rest for her until she had returned to that haven and to the man she loved.

Much of the next day, Sunday, was spent in active dread of the Colossus and a desire to avoid him. Helen mixed freely with the other guests. She went to church in the morning, she played bridge in the afternoon and by every means that was open to her she took precaution against being caught unawares. The last thing she desired was another *tête-à-tête* with Saul Hartz.

In her present emotional state she was met with one

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harsh fact. For some reason she was now the prey of a secret fear. An unknown force had invaded her life. Suddenly the future had become an abyss. To such an extent was she possessed by a sense of the impending, that it was as if a sword was about to fall.

What this menace could be she was without means of knowing. But it was surely there, a phantom perhaps of an overdriven brain. At least Helen hoped that it might prove no worse than that. Certainly as far as she was aware, it had no ground in reason or logic, and was, therefore, without the stay of fact.

Color, however, was lent to this new fear in a rather odd way. Among her fellow week-end guests was a man named Wygram. The personality of this man excited Helen's curiosity. She had never met any one like him. A rather exotic, oriental appearance seemed to lend value and emphasis to his views on occultism, mental telepathy, thought transference and kindred subjects which were now so much in the air, and upon which, in an unobtrusive way, he seemed to be a veritable mine of information.

After Helen had spent an entrancing hour in talk with Mr. Wygram, she gleaned from her hostess by dint of judicious inquiry that he was now recognized the world over as an authority upon the Unseen. She learned further that this remarkable man had found a solution to more than one mystery that seemed impenetrable and that the police often had recourse to his services.

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This view of Wygram's unique powers was supported by the attention paid him by Saul Hartz. It was never a habit of the Colossus to flatter the vanity of his fellow men by sitting in public at the feet of Gamaliel. But it was clear to Helen that the oriental-ist had some potent attraction for him. More than once in the course of that day she saw the two men together in quiet corners. And to judge by the look of concentration on Mr. Hartz's face the subject of their talk was to him of vital concern.

At dinner, no doubt as a concession to the keen curiosity Helen had shown in regard to Mr. Wygram, she was taken in by him. Further acquaintance did but add to the interest he excited in her. Little passed between them that average people could have laid hold of as definitely enlarging the boundaries of human knowledge, but Helen felt all the same that her approach to certain subjects whose importance and value she could but vaguely surmise would from now on be more practical, more scientific, more expert.

"How far do you think it possible," she ventured to ask, "for one mind, or for a group of minds, to act subconsciously upon the mind of another person, without coming into direct contact with it, in order to control its actions?"

"An interesting speculation!" Wygram spoke with the simple candor of one very much a master of his subject. "I think myself the science—and as one happens to know, a dark and terrible science it is, which

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the East has already brought to an uncanny perfection—of imposing one's will upon the will of another is being developed to a point which threatens some very ugly developments."

"That is just what one feels oneself," said Helen.

"Only the other day," said Wygram, "I was called in by the New York police to help in a terrible case which has made a great impression over there. It was that of a man, otherwise presumably sane, who committed a perfectly senseless and illogical crime because a deadly enemy, an expert practitioner of the new science, had been able to tamper with the mind of that man subconsciously while he slept."

"How dreadful!"

Wygram agreed that the speculations opened up by a fact so sinister were not pleasant. "The whole world is on the down grade," he said. "Man has played things up too high. For many years he has been dealing with unclean things—subtle poisons, high explosives, black magic. But to my mind this new science which has come out of the East is the worst of all, because it is by far the most elusive."

"Can it be used, do you suppose, on a large scale?"

"The fear is that it can be," said Wygram, "and that it will be. An unlucky signalman the other day at Hellington had a lapse of memory. The London express ran into a goods train that was being shunted out of a siding. Such a thing, in normal circumstances, should never occur. By reason of it, sixteen

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people were killed and sixty-eight injured. Among the killed were the Chancellor of the Exchequer and a Judge of the High Court. Accident, says the world. A rub of the green, say the directors of the railway company. Fate, say the newspapers. Call it what you will, but at the point the perverted mind of man has now reached, who shall say what the real cause was? Perhaps a certain very distinguished Chinese thinker now in this country might be able to throw a new light on a terrible occurrence." At the look of horror in the eyes of the woman at his side, Wygram paused. "Mind you," he said, "one does not for a moment accept all the implications that such a theory may open up. Let the possibility be advanced just for what it is worth. And I think"—his voice grew very gentle—"it would have been kinder, and perhaps wiser, not to have advanced such a possibility at all."

"Your studies have made you pessimistic," said Helen, hoping this was a straw to which she might cling.

"Yes, I quite think so," Wygram agreed. "Every mind becomes subdued to that in which it works. But I do feel that human life was never exposed to so many hidden perils as to-day."

"One feels that, too," said Helen. "Indeed,"—she shivered slightly—"the truth of that somehow strikes to one's marrow."

As she spoke, she was sharply aware that the man at her side was looking at her with a grave curiosity.

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"Forgive the question," he said, in his soft voice, "if it should seem impertinent,—but do you say that as a private member of the community, or as the wife of a man to whom so many eyes now turn in the hope that he may be able to do a great and much needed work for us all?"

Girt by the thought that Saul Hartz was at another table and that no fragment of their talk was likely to reach his ear, Helen confessed that she was now haunted, not so much on her own account as on that of her husband, by a great fear.

Something in her manner seemed to impress Wygram deeply. "Tell me," he said, in a voice hardly above a whisper, "just what it is that you fear in regard to him in the near future?"

"It is too vague to be put into words," said Helen, anxiously. But again she shivered, and again Wygram looked at her with his questioning eyes.

He forbore, however, from pressing the point further. So sharp was her distress that he gave the subject an adroit turn, and did not refer to it again. But this talk, all the same, made a profound impression upon Helen.

Next morning she breakfasted early, at the beck of a strong desire to catch the first possible train. London, her home, her husband were calling her. A second night of very little sleep had made Cloudesley and its surroundings almost intolerable. She was oppressed

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by a sense of being urgently needed elsewhere. Hour by hour, a conviction had gained strength in her mind that something was about to happen to John.

Perhaps "the something" had happened already. Who could say? An obsession seized her that such was the case. At all events, the breaking of his engagement for the week-end, without being able to give a reason, a proceeding altogether unlike him, lent color to this new and harsh belief. Both Hartz and Wygram, men whose every word meant much, had dropped more than one hint that her husband was in the toils of ineluctable fate.

Helen could not hope for peace of mind until she was back in Brompton Square. And soon after half past eight, as she crossed the hall to the car which was to take her to the station, with every thought fixed upon getting away from this hive of unpleasant memories, a simple thing happened which yet seemed to add tenfold to her fears.

Wygram, who was just coming down to breakfast, intercepted her at the foot of the stairs. "Good-by, my dear Mrs. Endor," he said, in a cordial tone. And then in one much lower, but of vital urgency, "Take care of your husband. The world has need of him. And if in the course of the next few days you feel you must have a friend whom you can really trust, please remember your compatriot, George Hierons, who, I believe, is still in London. It may be, of course, that the need will not arise. Sincerely one hopes it may

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not. But if it does, consult him. Again, good-by!"

These cryptic words did not lessen Helen's alarm. More than ever she was convinced that something had happened or was about to happen to the man she loved.

XLVIII

IT was within a few minutes of one o'clock when Helen reached Brompton Square. Of the maid who opened the door she inquired eagerly for Mr. Endor.

The fever of her mind was such that it felt a keen relief from the mere fact of John being in his room at work. She flew to him. But the feeling of joy left her the moment she entered the room. He was pacing heavily up and down in a way that brought to her mind a wild animal in a cage. His hands were clenched behind him, and his eyes, rather weird in their intensity, lent a look of strangeness to a haggard face.

So strong was the thrall upon him that even Helen's sudden appearance in the room did not cause him to throw it off. She could hardly bear to see his face. It was that of a man whose nerves had been deranged by the sight of a ghost. Indeed, when he stopped at last and turned towards Helen, there was something in that face which seemed to drive the blood from her heart.

"Darling!" she gasped as her hands clasped his coat,

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"tell me—tell me what is the matter? Why do **you** look like that? What awful thing has happened?"

He did not answer. She repeated the question with a tenser anxiety. "What is the matter? Do tell me!"

It was impossible for him to do so. In the urgency of the moment he did what he could to keep back the truth. But at the best, it was a lame, clumsy, half-hearted effort.

"You think you may have caught a slight chill motor-ing into the country yesterday?" An explanation so feeble could but add fuel to Helen's incredulity. Some-thing far beyond that poor excuse was called for by those wild eyes and ashen cheeks.

"Not that I'm really ill," he managed to say. But the voice was not his. Hollow, spectral, thin, it might have been a ghost's.

She knew that he was ill indeed. Eyes of despair, now palpably shrinking from contact with hers, told her too clearly that he was suffering from a grave malady. Moreover she knew he was trying his utmost to conceal the fact from her.

Suddenly her eye lit on a sheet of foolscap lying on the carpet. In the agitation of the moment it had drifted, no doubt, from his writing table. It was covered with recent writing which had been left to dry.

As Helen picked up this document, she glanced at it, almost without a thought of what she did. A swift in-tuition told her that this was no ordinary paper.

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He had been making his will!

"Why not?" He tried for a light and whimsical inflection, with which to turn aside that startled accusation. The failure to achieve it was complete. In fact, it was so complete that in the ear of Helen it sounded rather ghastly.

"Something awful has happened," she said. "I feel sure of it."

The alarm in her eyes, her note of fierce conviction, was becoming too much for him. Even if he owed it to her to carry the thing off bravely, in a fashion that would spare her infinite pain, he soon began to realize that in his present shattered state such a task was beyond him.

For the time being, she was stronger than he. Face to face with death he had made up his mind to accept it with stoicism, but the importunity of the woman he adored overcame him now. At first, he had been fully determined to tell her nothing. The concealed rock which had shattered a fine career should remain undisclosed. But he saw that it would be inhuman to meet death in silence and in secrecy, even had such a course been feasible.

How much should he tell? That was his problem. She was his wife, and had a right to know all. He had made, it was true, certain solemn vows. But these, as he now saw, had been entered upon in an evil hour. Therefore, he must break these vows and pay for the

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privilege with his life. But the question remained, how much would it be expedient to tell her?

One fact he did not doubt. Enemies, terrible and implacable, would be ranged against him. And if they should once suspect that their secrets had been divulged to Helen, her life, too, would not be worth a moment's purchase.

In spite of that, however, embarked on his strange story, he found it beyond his power to withhold any material detail. It became a sheer impossibility to choose or select. All had to be known, once the die was cast. Listening in grief and horror to a narrative of events which began with John's rooted conviction that the world was now at grips with a terrible evil, Helen was yet able in some measure to impose her will upon the man she loved. A deep instinct told her that the only hope of saving his life lay with her; and if so frail a chance was to be fruitful, she must acquaint herself with all the strands of the coil in which he was involved.

XLIX

AT the end of a story which, halting and fragmentary as it was, took some time to tell, Helen felt shattered. Deprived of the power to act or to think consecutively, all the force of a strong will was needed to sustain her. The awful Nemesis which had overtaken a phase of passing weakness in a good and brave man struck at her heart; but in the end it was perhaps as much as anything the sense of Fate's injustice that roused her fighting spirit.

With all the facts of the case before her, and once the control of her nerves had been regained, Helen soon made up her mind. Be the cost what it might, her husband's life should not be thrown away. By nature and temperament a woman of action, she was accustomed to reach quick and bold decisions. And in the moment her resolve was taken it was fortified by a sudden recollection of Wygram's final words. "If, in the course of the next few days, you feel you must have a friend whom you can really trust, please remember your compatriot, George Hierons, who, I believe, is still in London."

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Such words seemed truly prophetic. And as they came back to Helen's mind, she was upheld by a deep faith that John and she were not to be abandoned in this hour of strife against the powers of darkness. Providence was surely at their side. It was working for them. Counsel and sympathy had come to her mysteriously, but she recognized the source whence it sprang. Behind the phenomena of appearances there was somewhere a Friend. And that Friend, whoever, whatever it might be, she felt was going to help them now.

Luncheon was a miserable and belated meal. For both it was but a hollow pretense. They were in such a febrile state of anxiety that the mere presence of food was almost unbearable. But seated at the table, crumbling bread and sipping water, Helen was able to do a certain amount of thinking. At the end of this Barmecide feast, when she rose and left the dining room, a kind of plan was already taking shape in her mind.

All the facts of the case, which with infinite difficulty she had been able to drag out of John, were now more or less clear. They were marshaled in definite order, they fell into a logical scheme. It now remained for her to act without an instant's delay upon the data she had so painfully gathered. And yet to move at all in such a matter called for rare courage, high devotion.

At his wife's entreaty, Endor went down to the

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House of Commons as soon as luncheon was over. Her clear good sense, upon which he now leaned heavily, saw that for him in so terrible a crisis the paramount need was to keep at work. She divined that the only chance he had of holding on to the will was to occupy himself as much as possible. In such a crisis any form of brooding or inaction would be fatal.

For her, anything of that kind would be fatal, too. She must not look before or after. It was like crossing an abyss on a narrow plank. Her resolve taken, her plan formed, one pang of indecision might paralyze a nerve upon which all chance of safety depended. And she must act without an instant's delay.

She listened for the click of the front door. And then from the discreet ambush of the charming new curtains of that singularly pleasant room, in which so lately as two days ago, each individual object had been a thing of delight, she watched her husband's tall and picturesque figure disappear round the corner of the Square into the Brompton Road. Then she went to the telephone at once and rang up Freeman's Hotel.

It seemed an age before her demand to speak with Mr. Hierons could be met. A voice was not sure whether Mr. Hierons was now staying at the hotel, but it would find out. He had been away some days and the voice rather fancied that he had not yet returned. Minutes passed. And then in the midst of a baffled impotence that was almost a fever now, to

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Helen's unspeakable relief, a tone she faintly recognized said, "Are you there?"

George Hierons was speaking. If Mrs. Endor cared to come round at once to the hotel he would be glad to wait in for her.

L

ON the way to Freeman's Hotel in a taxi, Helen did her best to remember that she still lived and moved and had her being in twentieth century London. She tried hard to keep all the simple and familiar realities before her mind. Everything looked so oddly different now from what it had done less than three hours ago when she had driven west from St. Pancras station, that such a ritual seemed necessary. She was plunged in a state of affairs whose fantastic horror it was hardly possible for a mind so sane as hers to exaggerate. It was like living in a nightmare, except that it was much more vivid. But when everything around, the rattle of the taxi, the London mud, the raw air, had convinced her that she was truly awake, she might have bartered her immortal soul to believe otherwise.

George Hierons, who was living *en suite*, received Helen in his own private sitting room. He greeted her with a cordial tenderness which could only have sprung from the regard of an honest and a good man. Yet hardly a glance was needed to tell her that not a

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little of her own acute distress was shared by a true friend.

The face of George Hierons was that of a highly sensitive man who was suffering acutely. His visitor was struck by a tragic change in his appearance. Eyes and cheeks had deep hollows, their lines a look of age that mere years did not warrant; and underlying a strong and beautiful face was a torment of pain, stifled and repressed, that Helen could not bear to see.

She had the courage to begin with a conventional remark. But Hierons at once made clear that there was no need to withhold anything. He took her hands gently in his own.

"You have done a wise thing in coming to see me," he said without a word of preface. "Tell me just how much you know."

Helen hesitated. John had revealed much as to the workings of the Society, but he had been careful not to disclose the names of its members. She had strong reason to suspect that Hierons belonged to it, but until she was quite sure it would be the height of folly to lay her cards on the table.

"You may tell me all," he said, reading her thoughts without difficulty. "I was with the Council so recently as half past eleven this morning—if it is any satisfaction to you to know that."

"That is to say you belong?"

"Yes," he said, again taking her hands.

She could not hide the look of frank horror that

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came into her eyes. Her impulse was to draw away from him as if he had been a thing unclean. Man of fine perceptions as he was, he yielded instantly to her emotion, not trying to combat it, but stepping back a pace with a slight bow.

"You see," he said in a low voice, "the stake we play for is the highest there is. All that we do, all that we have done, all that we hope to do, is dictated by the faith that the peace of the world depends upon us."

"Do you still believe that?" asked Helen, looking at him steadily.

He did not answer at once.

With an insurgency of feeling, an odd tightening of her throat and breast, she repeated her question.

"Yes," he said. "That is still our position."

"You honestly think," said Helen, "that evil can be met with evil? You think that murder can prevent murder?"

"In certain extreme cases," said Hierons, "we hold that view. The Church has failed, Christianity is a back number, one after another the higher moral sanctions are going by the board. Human society is very sick indeed. Only a desperate remedy can save it."

Helen looked bleakly at Hierons. But she didn't speak.

"The root of the trouble," Hierons went on, "is that it is still in the power of certain people, of one man if you like, to unchain forces more terrible than the earth has yet known. This unlucky planet of ours is enter-

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ing upon a new phase. Unless steps, drastic and immediate, are taken to bring under control those who now govern it, the human race may soon be faced with a catastrophe beside which all its other catastrophes—and Heaven knows what they have been in the immemorial past!—may appear of small account."

The grim intensity of her countryman's earnestness kept Helen silent. He paused a few seconds that she might say something, but she chose not to speak.

"I intend to take you fully into my confidence," said Hierons with the childlike simplicity of a great mind. "Our Society which we believe to include the flower of the world's creative wisdom takes no narrow or partial view. It sees the human race now at the mercy of a particular type of brain and that type is peculiarly ignoble. It sees other and finer types, developed on lines less grossly material, with but little chance against this archetype whose gospel is the cynical application of brute force. The weaker or more delicate types—so far as our Society can read world tendencies—are fighting a losing battle with their backs against the wall. In other words, so far as this unhappy time is concerned, Evil is stronger than Good."

"Hasn't it always been so?" said Helen.

"More or less, I agree. But human ingenuity has now entered a phase which is a direct menace to evolution itself. Never has it been so imperative that those who do evil for the love of evil should be brought under control."

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"Surely," said Helen, "that control can only be acquired by invoking the spirit of Right."

"True. And our Society, odd as the fact may seem to the uninitiate, exists for that very purpose."

Helen's face showed a frank incredulity. "You would have one believe," she said, with a thrill of horror in her voice, "that people are murdered secretly in the name of the Most High?"

"Murder is a harsh word. But as you say," Hierons went on in a stern, solemn tone, "the Society's every act is dictated by the aim it has in view. 'God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform.'"

"To me," said Helen with a little gasp of horror, "that sounds very like blasphemy."

"No, no!" said Hierons. "Consider the problem the world has now to face. It is all very well to say that faith will move mountains, but when Good is being done inevitably to death by the massed forces of Evil, it is for those of us who dare to believe that the world may yet be saved for mankind to use to the best of our skill what weapons the stronger power may have left us."

"Or to put it in another way," said Helen, who was following a singular argument closely, "believing as your Society does that this earth of ours is now ruled by the spirit of Evil, in order to restore the balance of power it is necessary in the most literal fashion to break the Sixth Commandment."

"Yes," said Hierons. "But only in the last resort."

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And such are the basic conditions which now govern the world that no other alternative is left to the Friends of Peace. Let us take a concrete instance. Saul Hartz has the power with the terrible machine he controls to bring about war between Britain and America. And the best informed people firmly believe that he will do so."

"But why should he? The power of the Universal Press is almost as great in one country as in the other."

"True. And there's the rub. The American Senate has recently decided to take strong action against the International Newspaper Ring. Certain trust laws, more or less obsolete, are going to be revived and rigidly enforced. The Colossus is now in a position to fight them and is preparing to do so. And say the wise, so that his will may prevail, he must presently force a fratricidal conflict which may plunge the entire world in darkness."

"You really feel," gasped Helen, "that he has that power?"

"Undoubtedly. All the strings are in his hand. He has brought to perfection the art of fouling public opinion at its source. And rather than this 'unthinkable' war—his favorite newspaper phrase!—shall come to pass, with hell loose in the very air we breathe, with famine and pestilence on every continent, and damage irreparable to all forms of organic life, it were better, say the wise, for the human race to close down altogether."

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"But surely all this is surmise?"

"Would that one might think so. For those who have eyes to see, the designs of the Colossus in 19— are just as clear as were those of Wilhelm II in the years prior to 1914. That is why the Society of the Friends of Peace is determined at all costs to remove Saul Hartz before a second and greater disaster overtakes this unlucky world."

Helen was silent. Extremists, tinged with fanaticism, these people might be, but as Hierons presented the facts of the case, and once granting its premises, there was no gainsaying the hard logic of the whole matter.

LI

A SOLEMN pause followed. And then Hierons, with rather an air of taking the bit between his teeth, went suddenly on:

"Fate has ordained that your husband shall do a thing which we, his friends and co-workers, humbly believe to be the will of God."

"That may be your view," said Helen. "It may be the view of your Society. But it is not my husband's. And he is quite ready to give his own life rather than take, as he believes unlawfully, the life of another man."

"To the Council yesterday," said Hierons, "your husband made a similar statement. And, my dear Mrs. Endor,"—deep feeling suddenly fused the voice of her countryman—"I have to say this: We, the six members of the Council who were present, were most profoundly moved by the appeal your husband made to us. The strength of his position in England at this moment we fully recognize. Upheld by a recent victory against enormous odds, he believes that he is called to a great work for the state. He believes that

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as far as Britain is concerned it is now possible to rally public opinion to a perception of the awful danger that lurks in the unbridled power of certain inimical forces."

"Has he not given proof already," said Helen, "of what he can do? What other man in this country could have won the Blackhampton election in the face of the U. P.?"

Hierons deferred to the force of that argument. "Oh, yes," he said, "the Council of Seven grants all that. It is the last to close its eyes to the hard fact. But the Society of the Friends of Peace, governed of necessity by a set of iron laws, has not the power to absolve any member from his vows."

"Is there then no way out for my husband?" asked Helen.

"Apart from the death of Saul Hartz, I am afraid there is none. Once a decree has been promulgated by the Council, the Society is bound to stand or fall by it. But let me say this: The Council is so deeply engaged with the great question your husband has raised——"

"—That the remedy is at least as bad as the disease," Helen interjected quickly.

"—Even if we don't go with you quite so far as that, your husband's words yesterday to the Council have already sunk deep. And I may say that it has appointed me to wait upon Mr. Endor in the course of

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to-morrow, so that, in its name, a certain proposal may be laid before him."

A vivid light came into Helen's eyes, as she asked what the proposal was.

"Let it first be made to your husband," said Hierons, in a tone kind and gentle, "before I disclose it to you. He may or may not feel at liberty to accede to it. One hopes sincerely that he will. And in any event it may help to lessen his doubts, by convincing him of the absolute *bona fides* of those whom he now stigmatizes as visionaries and fanatics. In the meantime, my dear Mrs. Endor, keep up your heart."

LII

HELEN, alas! returned uncomforted to her home. She had little hope. Grateful indeed for the true and real consideration George Hierons had shown her, a single conversation with him had yet proved that he, too, like all the members of the group to which he belonged, was an extremist.

At breakfast next morning, John, who was haggard and overstrung from loss of sleep, told his wife casually that George Hierons was coming to see him on business at eleven o'clock. Helen, from a natural desire to avoid a subject that was almost a menace to reason itself, had not mentioned her own visit to Freeman's Hotel. And so far as John knew, she was not even aware that the American was a member of the Council of Seven.

Avoid the subject as she might, Helen could not overcome a devouring curiosity in regard to Hierons' morning call. Was there still hope of a way out of this impasse? At best it could only be tenuous. Knowing her husband for the man he was, she felt sure that

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he would not yield a point without the full assent of his conscience.

On the stroke of eleven Hierons arrived. He was shown at once into the small room in which John Endor did his work. At the moment his visitor came in Endor was writing a letter. Rising at once with a formal greeting, he knew by the grip of the American's hand and his warmth of tone that he might count on his friendship and sympathy.

"I come from the Council," said Hierons briefly and without preface.

"So I understand," said Endor in a voice that betrayed no emotion. "Lien Weng wrote last night telling me to expect you."

"Did he mention the proposition I bring to you?"

"No."

Hierons was silent a short time. And then he said abruptly: "By the way, did your wife tell you of the talk we had yesterday afternoon at my hotel?"

Endor said that she had not spoken of it.

Hierons, diplomatist that he was, now began to proceed with caution. "After you had put the general position before your wife——"

"—Say rather that she dragged it out of me," said Endor with a wan smile.

"—she came to me. And having due regard to these difficult and peculiar circumstances I took her to some extent into the Society's confidence. Knowing so much, it seemed best, I think, that she knew more.

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Therefore, I would like her to hear what I have to say to you now. The whole position is so irregular that one feels her presence in this room will not do any harm. Moreover, at the point we are now approaching it is just possible that she may be able to help us."

Endor, however, was loath to consent. Already he regretted the fact that his wife knew so much. Surely, it had been wiser and kinder to have kept his own counsel. Such a matter was bound to distress her terribly. And the pain it must cause would serve no end. This was an affair in which he was sure that her good will could not possibly avail.

Hierons, all the same, persisted in his request. For a reason of his own he greatly desired that Helen should be present. And in the end John, much against his own judgment, allowed Hierons to prevail.

Endor went himself to fetch his wife.

Helen, for her own part, was only too eager to hear what the emissary of the Council of Seven had to say to her husband. Having learned so much already, she had now a burning desire to know all. Nevertheless, her hope was small that a way of escape from a terrible dilemma could be found.

LIII

AS far as the grim matter now in hand was concerned, Hierons was the soul of business. Perhaps he may have realized that if his task were not instantly performed he might not be able to accomplish it.

When Helen entered the room, the American at once opened the ball.

"I am desired by the Council of Seven to say this: As soon as the death of Saul Hartz has been accomplished, the Society will consider its immediate aim to have been achieved. It will no longer seek the world's peace on its present lines. In fact, it proposes at once to annul its constitution; as a corporate body it will cease to be."

"The Society is about to disband?" said John Endor, quickly.

"Yes,—as soon as Saul Hartz, the world's arch enemy, is dead. The transactions of the last few days have convinced some of the Society's deepest thinkers that the cause of humanity as a whole will be best

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served by the Friends of Peace going to work in other ways."

"There I am with it," said Endor. "Yet, may I ask, what does it propose to do with the strange and terrible secrets it possesses?—secrets which, it seems to me, must always imperil the very thing it has been called into being to safeguard."

"Before the Society passes out of existence," said Hierons, "it will appoint certain trustees; and to these, under strict legal forms, will be intrusted the great discoveries, so dangerous to mankind, which it has been the first function of our Society to control."

Endor, keenly following every word, expressed his approval.

"In the first place, as you may know," Hierons went on, "it was because of the discoveries made by certain chemists and scientists, among whom I have the honor to count myself, that the Society of the Friends of Peace was first called into being. From the outset we realized that having had the good luck or the ill luck—one hesitates to say which—to evoke such powers, it became our duty to control them rigidly. For that purpose, we formed ourselves into a kind of International Conscience, on lines not dissimilar to the ill-starred League of Nations, which failed, as one is bound to believe, mainly because of the short-sighted policy of my own country. That, however, is still a sore subject upon which we won't enter here. To return to our Society, it was born when some of us re-

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alized that the science of destruction had become such a dire menace to mankind that something must be done to keep its latest achievements out of the hands of any one particular government."

"For the reason, I presume," said Endor, "that no individual government, in such a world as the present, could be trusted to wield such powers rightly?"

"Quite so."

"One is interested to know that."

"We owe it to you, my dear Endor," the American continued, "that our Society now sees that it has been working on wrong lines. The wisdom of using its own terrible secrets to enforce its aims has, some of us think, very properly been called in question. Before, however, the Council of Seven abolishes the present constitution it insists that its decree in regard to Saul Hartz be carried out."

Endor dissented strongly.

"Surely," said Hierons, "that position is not illogical. The death of this man is on all grounds desirable. He stands condemned in strict accordance with laws to which you have yourself most solemnly subscribed."

"I know, I know," said Endor.

"Moreover, the task falls upon you. And the means are in your hands. Nothing could be simpler or easier than what you have now to do. Will you not help us all by fulfilling your oath?"

"That's quite impossible," said Endor. "No one could welcome the limiting of the Society's functions

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more earnestly than myself, but rather than take the life of another, in such circumstances, I am fully prepared to take my own."

"All of us," said Hierons, "are particularly anxious that your life shall not be sacrificed. We recognize that in the immediate future it is likely to be of signal use to the world. But, unhappily, there can be no going back on the Society's laws. The Council of Seven is bound to insist that its decree be carried out within the time appointed."

"Not by me," said Endor, flatly. "That cannot be. And, as I say," he added, "I am quite ready to accept the alternative. It is no more than a just penalty for tampering with forbidden things."

"Don't forget that the world can ill spare you."

"If that is a true estimate of one's worth, it is for the Council of Seven not to forget it."

Hierons glanced furtively at Helen, who stood pale and rigid, a figure of tragedy. The silence which ensued was painful to all three. And then Hierons said suddenly, "Tell me, where do you keep the phial that was given you by Lien Weng?"

"There, my friend." With a cool laugh that had a note of defiance, Endor pointed to a safe at the other end of the room. "That is the only place for such a diabolical contrivance. No wonder," he added, "that the Society of the Friends of Peace has been able to give the police cold feet."

Hierons agreed. "But please," he said, "do it the

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justice of remembering that in the first instance it was formed to meet the situation to which this and kindred discoveries have given rise. And please remember, also, that we of the white races, although this particular discovery is not really ours, are determined to the utmost of our power to keep it under strict control."

Endor smiled sadly, and shook his head.

"Awful possibilities have been opened up, I grant you, but, please God, the world at large may trust those whom the Society shall choose not to fail in their task. I hope you agree that such a task is safer in private hands than in those of any government."

"I wonder!" said John Endor.

A further long pause followed. And then George Hierons said, in a tone which in such circumstances seemed rather careless, "If you are not going to make use of the phial you had better give it to me."

Endor looked keenly at the American. "In order," he said, choosing each word with care, "that you may use it in the breaking of the Sixth Commandment?"

Hierons did not deny that such was his intention.

"No, no, my friend," said Endor, decisively. "I cannot aid and abet you in doing that which I will not do myself."

"But that is surely extreme," said Hierons, with a touch of impatience. "Please give me the phial that I may do with it as I choose. Even if there was time to procure a second phial before the term expires, the laws of the Society make it impossible for one to do

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so. The code which governs the use of this weapon is very rigidly enforced."

"I am glad to know that such is the case," said Endor, grimly. "And I fully appreciate your own courage and self-sacrifice. But, as I say, I cannot help you or any one else to do that which my conscience will not sanction my doing myself."

"Don't be quixotic," said Hierons, with growing impatience. "As far as one can see, this is the only possible way out."

Endor, however, was a rock. "I cannot, I will not, lend myself to cold-blooded murder. It is true that at a time of severe overstrain, I made certain vows. And it is true that I have chosen to break them. But having done so deliberately, I am now ready to pay a full price for the privilege."

Such a finality of tone moved Helen to tears. Hierons, also, was deeply affected.

"You ought to think of others," said Helen, piteously. "The world must not lose you. Does your life, your work, mean nothing?"

Endor raised his hands to his face with the gesture of a man driven beyond his strength. But he did not speak.

As Helen and George Hierons stood watching him, a sense of utter despair came upon them. They now shared in common a desolating thought. Even in a world in which Good was submerged, it seemed possible to pay too high a price for the hope of dethroning Evil.

LIV

HELEN and the American had a sudden craving for fresh air. For both the restriction of four walls had grown intolerable. Endor's wife begged her friend as he was leaving the house to let her walk with him some of the way towards his hotel.

Hierons readily assented.

Devoured by pity for a brave woman, he was also devoured by pity for a brave man. Loyal as he was to the Society which he had sincerely believed to be necessary to the world's governance and which he had done as much as any man to call into being, he saw now that its methods had been pushed too far. But with bitterness of soul he realized that he could do nothing. Like Endor himself he was caught in a tragic coil of Fate's weaving.

The morning was fine, the pavements were dry, and the sky was reasonably clear for December in London. For some time they walked in silence. They had become great friends, these two. There was more between them than the tie of nationality. On vital is-

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sues their minds marched together. Their outlook on life was the same.

"This horrible coil," said George Hierons at last, "began first to be woven when America declined to enter the League of Nations. Her arguments, at the time, were no doubt strong, but she was not able to see far enough."

Helen sighed. "To me," she said, "the inability to see far enough begins to seem the universal tragedy, common to each individual life and to the life of every nation."

Hierons agreed. And he added with an air whimsically prophetic: "Man being as he is in the world that we know, it is a tragedy for which there can be no remedy. Even the wisest people have to improvise their actions from day to day, without knowing or being able to guess what their re-percussion will be."

Slowly they walked along Knightsbridge, past Hyde Park Corner into Piccadilly. As they approached the Ritz, which was on the other side of the road, the eyes of both were most oddly caught by a sight that held them fascinated.

They had grown alive to the fact that Saul Hartz was stepping off the pavement immediately in front of them. In spite, almost in defiance, of a flux of traffic, the Colossus made a bee line for the opposite side of the street. With a glossy silk hat tilted at a rather rakish angle, the fur coat of the plutocrat and an umbrella with an ivory crook depending from

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his right arm, his progress almost into the very jaws of the swift-moving buses and motors was so arrogant, so inhumanly cool, as to be sublime.

Oddly enough the thing which really fixed the eyes of the two spectators was the umbrella with the ivory crook. It hung so negligently from the arm of the great man that just as he was about to put off to the farther shore it threatened to drop from its perch. With a quick motion Saul Hartz re-grappled it to his arm.

Helea and George Hierons, their eyes and thoughts in the spell of a single image, halted for nearly a minute, yet without speaking a word, to watch the Colossus cross the wide road and enter the hotel. Still without speaking, but with an unforgettable picture in their minds, they resumed their walk as far as the corner of Dover Street.

"Thank you for bearing with me so far," said Helen offering her hand.

"Won't you come and have lunch somewhere?" said Hierons.

Helen declined the invitation. She frankly owned that food was very far from her thoughts just now.

Both were suffering. The American kept Helen's hand a moment in his own. "I shall be at my hotel," he said, "for at least another week. You have only to communicate with me at any time and I will come to you at once—if there is any chance of my being of the slightest use."

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She thanked him.

"In the meantime,"—his quiet voice deepened to intensity—"we who share great and unhappy secrets must keep close together in the thoughts of one another. We can but watch out in the hope that somehow—somewhen—a sign may be given."

Helen was not able to speak. A single tear forced its way slowly along an eyelid and down a thin cheek.

Just as she was about to turn away in the direction of her club, an afterthought, swift and half-formed, caused Hierons still to detain her.

"There's just one thing," he said, "that—that occurs to me." In odd contrast to his habitual air of decision his voice was halting, his words fragmentary. "There may . . . may be a possibility . . . and yet no . . . after all . . . it hardly bears thinking about." In a fashion abrupt and strange he checked his words. "It wouldn't be wise to . . ."

Helen looked at him disconcertedly. The man who was speaking was not the George Hierons she knew.

"No, we won't clutch at straws," he said enigmatically. "Let us continue to meet the facts of the case. But whenever you want me, ring up my hotel and I will come to you at once."

She thanked him again. Then she turned and walked slowly down the street.

For a minute or more he stood to watch that tragic figure pass from view. An unspeakable oppression weighed heavily upon him. And then in the midst of

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it, with a feeling that was half nausea, half elation, a quick thought recalled to his mind that Lien Weng was in London. He remembered, moreover, that the President of the Council was staying at the Ritz.

As if drawn by a new chain of ideas Hierons turned suddenly and crossed the road. One more brief moment of reflection followed. Then slowly and sombrely he made his way to the doors of the hotel.

LV

HELEN, in the meantime, had reached the end of Dover Street and had entered her club. It was now one o'clock, but she could not bear the thought of food. Her mind was in a state of such imminent disruption that it seemed to call for every resource of a powerful will to hold it together.

She found an armchair in a quiet corner and gave herself up to the task of calming her brain. A horrible feeling of suffocation came to her, tinged with physical agony. She felt as a mouse must feel when caught in a trap.

All the same, the entire mechanism of a clear and powerful intelligence was working furiously. A very vigorous human animal was at bay. Every resource that her body and soul possessed, and they possessed many, had now come automatically into play. No matter what the cost to others or to herself, she must save the life of the man she loved.

Crudely stated that was the point her overdriven mind had reached after she had spent a long hour trying to

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dragoon it. At the end of that time she sat down at a table and took up a pen.

She had decided to send a letter to Saul Hartz saying that she wished particularly to see him on an urgent private matter. To this end she would invite him to come and drink tea in her new house at four o'clock on the following Friday or Saturday afternoon. Such a letter was not at all easy to write. More than one attempt had to be put in the waste paper basket before she came near saying in the right way the particular thing she wished to express.

With the letter composed at last more or less to her mind, she dropped it in the post box in the hall and went out of the Club. Turning into Bond Street, she walked as far as a locksmith's at the Oxford Street end. Here she sought advice as to the means of opening a patent Warlock fireproof safe, of which the key had been mislaid.

A duplicate key was the suggested remedy. Helen thereupon arranged that on the following afternoon at four o'clock—at which hour John was sure to be at the House or at one of his clubs—an expert should come to Brompton Square and see what could be done in the matter.

LVI

THE days that remained of a terrible week imposed a strain upon Helen almost beyond what she could bear. On the next afternoon the locksmith came at the time appointed and was able to provide a key to the safe out of the stock of keys in his possession.

As soon as the man had gone, Helen opened the safe and satisfied herself that the phial in its gun-metal case was still there. She had been given to understand that a child might use it, so remarkably simple was its operation. The colorless fluid, rather less in quantity than one tenth of a liter, had merely to be sprinkled on the coat of the victim at a point contiguous to the spinal column. Death would then ensue in three hours or less, without leaving a trace of its cause.

With a sense of grim repulsion, Helen pressed the tiny spring which held together the gun-metal case—a thing of exquisite contrivance—and satisfied herself that the phial and syringe were very much as she expected to find them. Her horror of this devilish

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thing was very real. But to the best of her ability she had thought out what had to be done. She saw herself as the hapless instrument of destiny. And she had not endured nine-and-twenty years of life without a clear perception of the stern fact that its decrees, no matter how ruthless, how savage, must be accepted.

She now awaited, with every spark of patience she could muster, a reply to her letter to Saul Hartz. He might not even deign to answer it. Or if answer he did, being the man he was, with so many calls upon his inadequate day of twenty-four hours, he was hardly likely to find the time or to take the trouble to pay a visit to Brompton Square. And in that event, which seemed to grow more and more inevitable, what then must be her course of action?

In the grip of a problem that would not bear thinking about, Helen waited, every sense astretch, for the arrival of each post. Three and four times a day she flew to the letter box, in the vain hope of seeing the crabbed, familiar handwriting of Saul Hartz lying in it.

Would no answer come? In the course of a distracted Wednesday that question became in her mind a specter. In Fate's hourglass the sands were running out. Life was now so sharp a torment that it was hardly bearable. Strong her will yet was and, in spite of all, her faith still firm. And at the beck of some power, not herself, she was called to play a part which she believed to have the highest sanction.

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In the last resort, she was sure that the movements of the Colossus, whose shadow might soon be lying athwart the whole world, must be determined by Fate itself. Was God's hand strong enough to direct this man to her house at the time she had proposed? It was the sense and the knowledge of ultimate things which kept Helen sane in the course of the intolerable hours of that Wednesday night.

The next morning, after a vigil which seemed interminable, she was down before eight o'clock. That was the hour, as a rule, when the first post came. Eagerly she listened for the familiar knock. And when, just as the hour struck, the knock was plainly heard, she could hardly muster courage to go as far as the letter box in the hall. Go, however, she did.

There was a mail of eight letters. And among them one, a small neat envelope, bore the unmistakable handwriting which for two days past had been stamped upon the retina of Helen's imagination.

She tore the letter open. There was a brief line:

"MY DEAR HELEN:

"Yes, certainly, with the greatest pleasure I will come and see your new home at four o'clock Friday afternoon.

"Yours always,

"S. H."

LVII

THE letter of the Colossus was characteristic. Such cordial simplicity was so like him. In a keen and swift recoil of feeling which cut like a knife, Helen recalled the man as he had always seemed to her. It was a case, if ever there was one, of multiple personality. To her Saul Hartz had appeared a man whose kindness, charm, generosity it would have been hard to exaggerate. There might have been motive behind it all, but so far as Helen was concerned personally there was no reason to think so. He liked her because he liked her. The human beings for whom the Colossus had a regard were not many, but certainly she was among the chosen few admitted to the sunny side of a nature complex, enigmatic, subtle beyond analysis.

Helen now did not doubt that in sum the Colossus was a bad man; a creature of abnormal powers of mind who owed the workaday world of men and things a grudge for having been born into it. He was a natural enemy, who at the call of a perverted genius was ready to under-pin civilization, that crazy structure, the

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moment he got the chance. And that chance was surely coming, unless——

His friendly letter in hand, Helen had now to harden the will with a brief restatement of a dreadful plight. She was luring a man who on the surface was simple and kindly to her house in order to do him to death. As she sat down to breakfast opposite her husband and toyed with dry toast and a cup of tea, a ghoulis sense of nightmare seemed to cause the four walls of their little dining room to contract.

John was very pale. He, too, had not slept. At three o'clock he had got up and dressed and had spent the night's remaining hours downstairs among his books. Helen saw that his hand was trembling as she gave him his cup. He, too, was living on his nerves.

This long-drawn Thursday was for both an intolerable day. They now stood together fighting with their wills against an implacable destiny. John, some instinct told her, was already trying to subdue the whole force of his nature to the thought of death. Precisely in what form it would overtake him or when it might be expected to do so, he did all that he could not to allow her to guess. But in the course of another night in which neither of them closed their eyes, words escaped his lips that gave her a clue to the mind process which in the end would destroy him.

"Macbeth has murdered sleep," he whispered to her in the winter darkness. "This side the grave, my darling, I shall never sleep again."

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She hugged him close, as a mother hugs a child. Nature, she knew then, was nearing exhaustion. All too soon the will that grappled him to life must relax. And then in a moment of frenzy, of desperation, he would kill himself.

It behooved her, as long as was possible, to delay that moment. Friday was already here. And at four o'clock that afternoon Saul Hartz had promised to come to her. Pray Heaven that he did not fail!

As Helen lay in bed, however, listening hour by hour to the chime of the clocks of many neighboring steeples, she was haunted by a fear that the man by her side would not be able to carry on through the day. One stroke of a razor while he shaved, one step in front of an electric train, what could be simpler? His controls were yielding. Of that fact there were many indications. The question was, could he now outlast this all-important day?

Many times she had urged him to take a bromide, but he had not done so. Such things were likely to prove worse than futile. Death was the penalty he inevitably would have to pay; and his mind and will were at one in that, so far as his soul's welfare was concerned, it was best that death came to him through his instincts working in a natural and unfettered way.

"If one bedevils oneself," he argued, "with drugs and potions one may lose control of one's reason altogether. And that will mean a state of aphasia compared with which death is more than kind. Hell is a

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mental condition. And there is none to equal that of the man who longs for death and yet has not the nerve to ensue it."

Helen had felt bound to respect this attitude of mind. But dressing now in the wintry dawn of Friday, the question that harrowed her was, Could unaided nature hold him to his course for another four-and-twenty hours?

Immediately their pretense at breakfast was over, they went to a church close by. Here they stayed nearly three hours. And when they emerged from its precincts into the December gloom, they felt far down in their hearts that at the back of everything was still a Friend who was surely helping them to keep their sanity.

As evidence of this strength that had been given them both were able to take a little food. And then for Helen came the facing of the grim problem—How did John propose to spend the afternoon?

She had hoped that he would go down to the House of Commons. But as soon as luncheon was at an end he retired to the room in which he worked. An hour passed and yet he made no sign of going out. Presently the clock struck three; and Helen, no longer able to bear the suspense, came in and found him sitting apathetically at his table, not attempting to write or to read.

Her instinct for the practical showed her now the paramount need of making up his mind for him. She determined to take a strong line.

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"It's such an unpleasant afternoon that I am going to get you a taxi."

The eyes he lifted to hers seemed to have scarcely a spark of life in them. "Why—a taxi?" he asked dully.

"To take you to the House."

He shook his head. "I'm not going there again."

"Oh, but you are," she said quickly. "Just once more—to please me."

The eyes that looked at her were those of a man who was near the end of his tether. "But I said good-bye to it yesterday," he muttered.

Plain sense now told her that all must depend on the imperious exercise of her own strong will. She left the room, to return almost at once with his coat and hat. "Ferris has gone for a taxi," she said.

"No, no," he said wearily, "I don't feel up to it to-day."

"Make the effort, my darling—if only because I ask you."

Loving her as he did, it was hard to refuse. The spirit was willing, but alas he was no longer in command of himself.

"You needn't stay long," said Helen beguilingly. "But in the name of that in which we both believe and for the sake of the work we have still to do——"

As one compelled by sheer magnetism he got up slowly from his chair. With resolute deftness she fixed him up with his overcoat. "Promise me that you will take a taxi home again."

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He didn't say anything.

"Promise," she gently insisted. "Anyhow, I'll promise for you. And you'll come back to me, won't you? Yes, you will." She pressed her lips to his cold cheek. "You shall—you must!"

With the same gentle insistence she led him out of the room and through the tiny entrance hall. As if he had been a small child going to a New Year's party she herded him into the taxi.

As she closed the door upon him, she put her head through the lowered window with a little laugh that was almost gay. "Something tells me that Providence is working for us. Promise me, darling, that you'll take a taxi and come straight back home?"

As the taxi began to move she ran beside it.

"Promise?"

"I'll do my best," he muttered as the taxi began to outpace her.

LVIII

THERE now remained for Helen the task of awaiting the arrival of Saul Hartz. Four o'clock was the hour that he was due.

The rather tiny drawing room in which she intended to receive him was quite a delight to the eye. It was choice, seductive, trim. Much care and taste had been lavished on the decorations, the hangings, the general scheme. A bright fire burned on a cosy hearth of blue and white Dutch tiles. Everything was a harmony of delicate blues and greens. No room could have been more civilized. It was really fantastic that a creature like herself, one whose mind was humane, creative, essentially modern, essentially sane, should have invited a man to such a room in order to murder him.

That aspect of the case didn't bear thinking about. And with a courage that showed no sign of failing now the crisis was at hand she put it away from her. She went to the safe in the other room to procure the phial. But as she was in the act of unlocking its heavy door, a paralyzing thought flashed along her nerves.

Suppose . . . suppose . . . the phial was not there!

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It was more than likely that John had now reached a state of mind when he could carry this deadly thing about with him for use upon himself. It was such a simple, convenient mode of exit from the world. As the door of the safe yielded to the key, she had a thrill of pure fright. This new hypothesis had a touch of inevitability that appalled her. But the fear instantly passed. There, in the place in which she had last seen it, was the gun-metal case.

A careful examination told her that as far as she could learn the apparatus was in working order. She took it accordingly to the drawing room and set it on the chimneypiece in a place easily accessible, behind a charming Wedgewood vase. Next it was a pretty little French clock which soon chimed half past three.

She then took up a piece of needlework and began with skilful fingers to weave a mosaic of colored silks. All too soon, however, she discovered that she was not quite superhuman. After five minutes or so she was compelled to put it down. Every nerve in her body was in a state of mutiny.

Several books from the circulating library were on a small table near her hand. The first she took up was entitled *New Uses for the Will: a translation from the Chinese of Lien Weng*. Involuntarily her glance strayed towards the chimneypiece and the Wedgewood vase. The coincidence made her shiver.

She set the book down as if it had been a live coal. Then she got up and began feverishly to pace the room.

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For one horrid moment she had the illusion again that its four walls were closing in upon her. But it was dispelled for the time being by the entrance of the parlor maid with a silver tray containing tea things.

The clock on the chimneypiece began melodiously to chime four.

"Is that clock right, Ferris?" The high thin voice, as heard by herself, sounded to Helen quite unlike her own.

"Yes, m'm, I believe so."

"You needn't draw the curtains. I'll attend to those myself."

"Thank you, m'm."

The parlor maid went out of the room.

LIX

AS none knew better than Helen, it was a foible of the Colossus always to be "on time." Punctuality is the soul of business, she had heard him say was his favorite aphorism.

The minutes ticked on, however, and she listened in vain for a ring at the front door bell. She went up to the drawing-room window and looked down into the Square. The street lamp, just opposite the front door, was already lit. The December evening was fast closing in. She listened tensely for the sound of an approaching car. Her eyes tried to pierce the fog, which after hanging about all day had increased considerably during the last hour.

A quarter past four struck. Helen had now ceased to think of anything she did, but proceeded to draw the heavy curtains across the window. And then guided by the bright glow of the fire she went to the door and switched on the light.

All at once it dawned upon her that now she would have to meet a fact that as yet had not taken shape in her mind. The Colossus might not come. It was

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so unlike him to be late. And he was such a busy man, with so many calls upon his time, that something might have intervened at the last moment to prevent his coming. But in that case, she argued, man of method as he was and respecter in small matters of the rights of others, he would almost certainly have let her know.

While her mind was busy with these pros and cons the clock moved steadily on. It chimed the half hour. More and more positive she grew that Saul Hartz would not come now. Her mind began to reach out tentatively to meet the new and unforeseen situation. The one hope she had, a desperate and perhaps a fantastic hope, of saving her husband's life seemed already to have passed away.

She rang for the tea. It was necessary to do something, even if it involved a trivial action, in order to keep a hold of the will. The tea was wormwood in her mouth, but she was able to drink one cup. And then, with the walls of the room closing in upon her more surely than ever, she lay down on the sofa.

The clock chimed five. Her mind grew numb. All power of action was ebbing away from her. She realized that she could do no more. But half dazed as she was by the strong and cruel reaction that had already set in, she yet heard the honk honk of a motor as it entered the Square, followed at once by a sound of wheels.

Intensely she listened for the ring of the front door

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bell. But she listened in vain. In her excitement she got up from the sofa on which she sat. Hardly had she done so when the door opened, and John came into the room.

He was still wearing his overcoat and hat. In his ashen face was a look of burning intensity. They stood a moment looking at each other in a silence that was rather grotesque.

"Darling . . . tell me . . . what has happened?"

Endor did not answer the question. Or rather, he answered it by taking from a pocket of his overcoat "the late extra" edition of the *Evening Press*. The front page was draped heavily in thick mourning lines. He folded back the paper, set his finger on the middle column, and then handed it to Helen.

Her head swam round as she read:

TRAGIC DEATH OF SAUL HARTZ

The salient facts of the occurrence were that

about three o'clock this afternoon, shortly after leaving the Imperium Club in Pall Mall, Mr. Hartz was run over and instantly killed. According to eye-witnesses of the accident, which took place at the bottom of the Haymarket, Mr. Hartz was in the act of crossing from the Carlton Hotel, when he dropped his umbrella in the roadway. As he stooped to retrieve it he was knocked down by a newspaper van belonging to the Universal Press which came round the corner at that moment.

The uncanny silence which gripped them was broken at last by Endor's high-pitched laugh. "First with the news as usual," he said.

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Helen could not speak.

"There is a God after all!" said Endor.

The still half-terrified eyes of Helen strayed from the ashen face of her husband, in which a new light was breaking, to the chimneypiece and its blue Wedgwood vase. "I wonder," she gasped, "I wonder!"

THE END



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